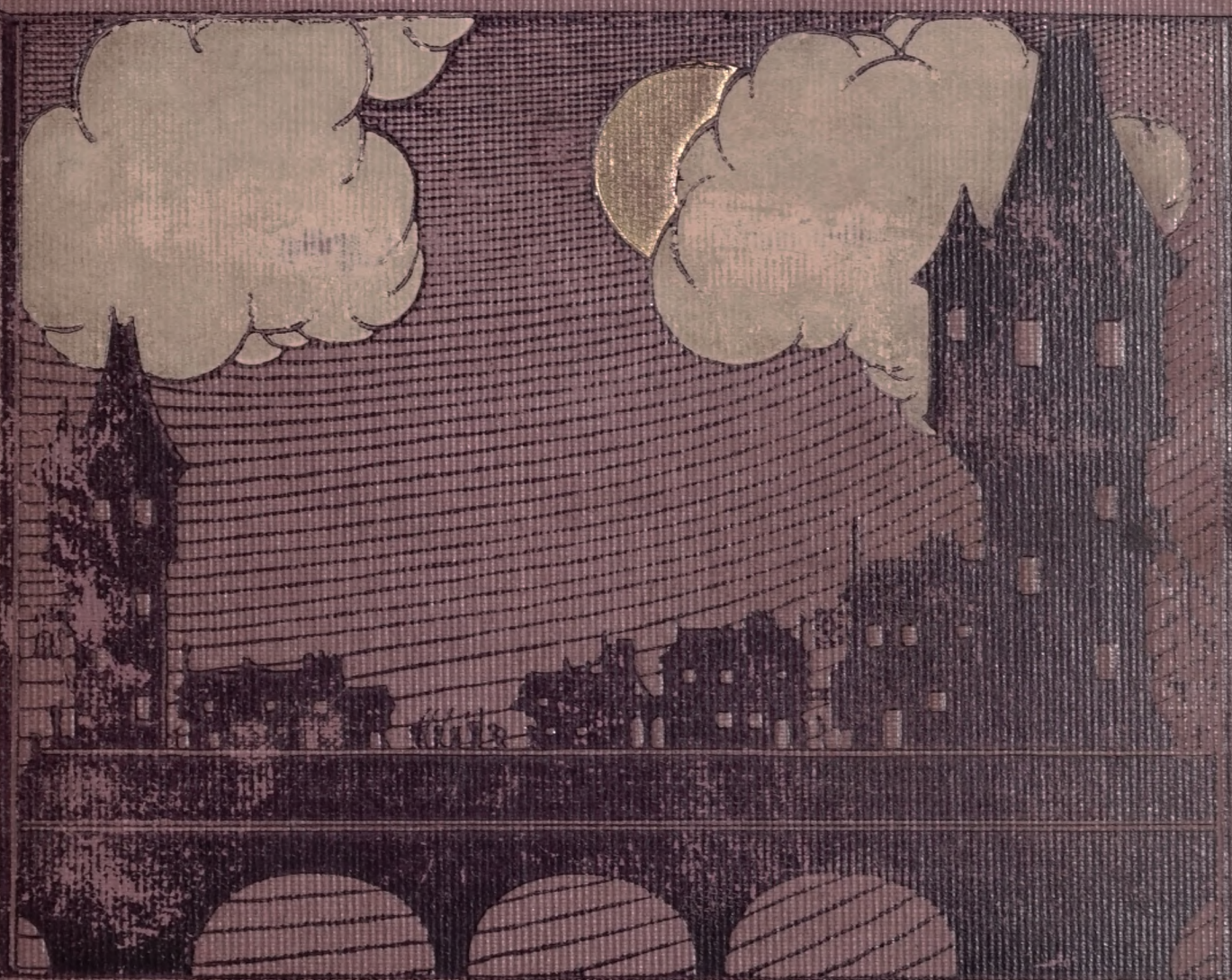


BY THE
QUEEN'S
GRACE



VIRNA SHEARD



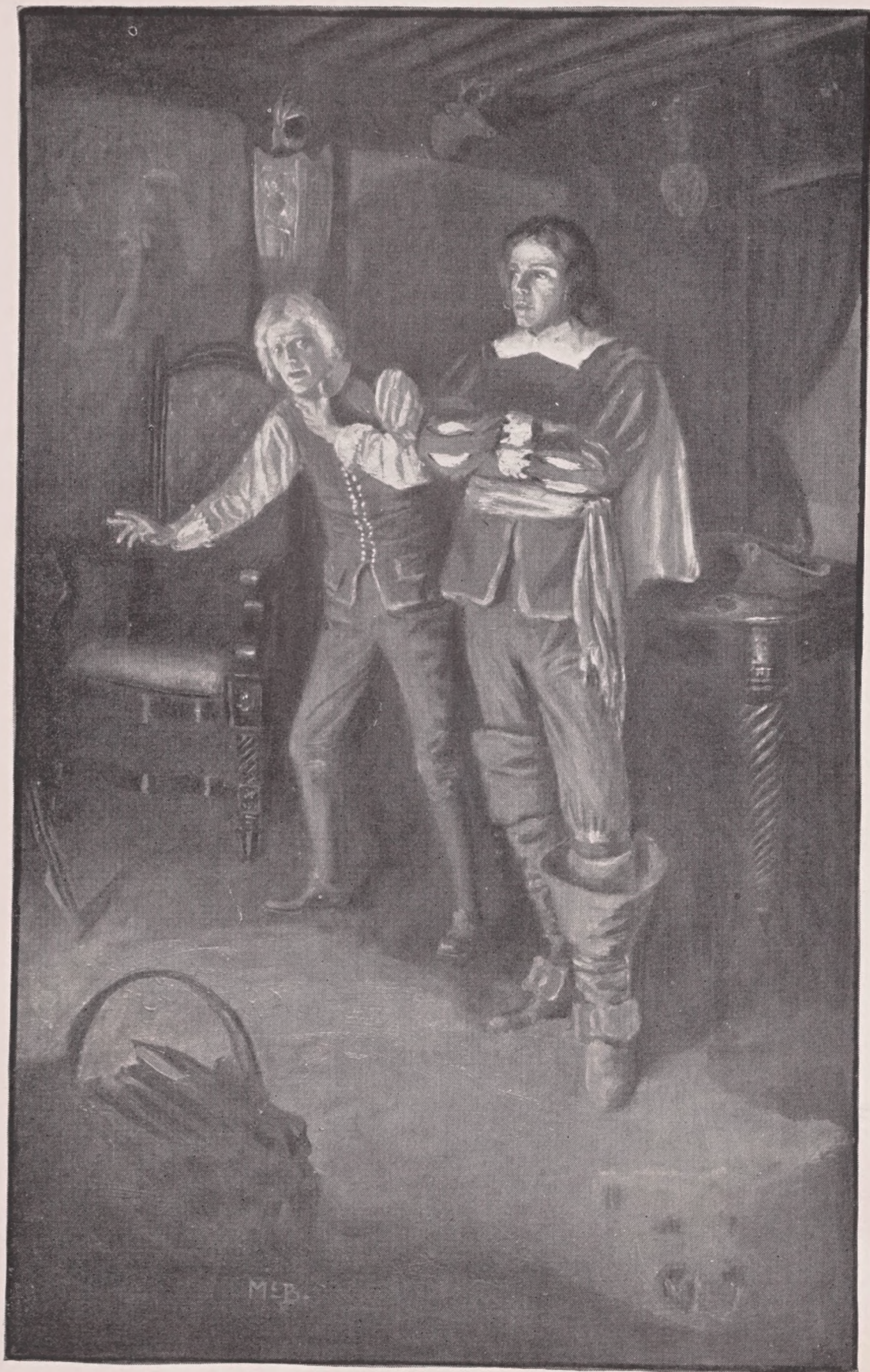
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BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE



"MICHAEL, I WOULD KILL HIM."

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BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

A NOVEL

By

Virna Sheard

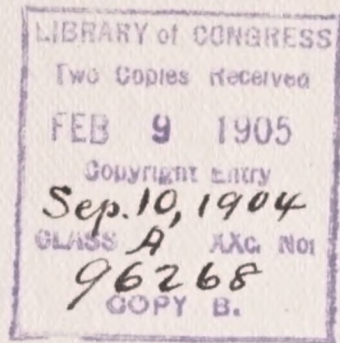
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TELLING SOMEWHAT OF OLD
LONDON BRIDGE, OF RICHARD
DAVENPORT, TOLL-TAKER AT
NORTH TOWER, AND HIS
DAUGHTER JOYCE

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

CHAPTER I

THE toll-house at the northern tower of London Bridge was warped and rickety. Its gabled roof, red with rust, curled up at the eaves like the sides of a bishop's hat, and the whole place leaned far over the river, seeming, indeed, to keep from falling more by some force of adhesion than stability of construction.

Those were the days of the old bridge. Afterward Elizabeth restored it with much splendour, but at this time the narrow arches were crumbling and the foundations crazy with age. Still, the people loved it for all it had seen of England's past.

"If the bridge has a fault," said some wag of the time, "it is its irritating habit of falling down in places." Yet well had it stood out against the siege of time, and many a generation had it seen vanish as the river-mists of early morning.

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Many a grim crusader returning from the holy wars had crossed it in triumphant state to the music of clinking spurs and linked armour.

In the far-away days they let down the creaking drawbridge upon the southern side, so the beautiful boy-king, Richard, decked in his parti-coloured robes all a-jingle with little golden bells, might ride over in company of his merry following.

Henry V., fresh home from the plains of Agincourt with his battered army, made entrance into London through the northern gates of the bridge, while the people strewed rosemary branches in the way for remembrance of their dear-bought victories, and stopped the stern warrior that they might crown him with silver laurel-leaves.

In later times, when the country was divided against itself, hot-headed gentlemen wearing the white rose of York, or the red rose of Lancaster, galloped that way in knots of twos or threes from dawn till dark, and from dark till dawn again.

Harry of England, back from France and the mimic wars and tourneys of the Field of the

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Cloth of Gold, took this path into the city with all his dazzling courtiers in his train.

Sombre funerals had passed across the bridge in slow procession. Many a grim fight had stained the flooring red. Aye, and there had been jousts fought there for love of glory alone, when the towers had their turrets plumed with banners, and gay gentlemen rode beneath.

All these things the place knew, and many were its burdens—most gruesome of all, the ghastly heads of traitors. These terrible trophies were still spiked upon the great Southwark gate, and were lit up in horrible brilliancy at night, when the flaming links fluttering in the river-wind threw weird shadows over their staring faces.

Now Richard Davenport, toll-taker at the north tower, had been known far and wide in the days of his youth for his handsome face, and also for being a most rare villain. Nor did he lack wit, for he had slipped as by a charm through loopholes that were too small or difficult for his companions, and for the most part the traps set to catch other cut-purses failed to catch him. Neither had he been branded in any way, either

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by the cat-o'-nine-tails, or by a brad-awl through the ear, as was the common way, though this was more by his good luck than good management.

Yet Justice pursued him fiercely, and, light-heeled though he was, he had not always escaped.

Once he languished in the pillory through the scorching heat of two long summer days; once barely missed flogging at the tail of a cart; and later for desperate highway robberies he was captured and sentenced with three other gentlemen of the road to be hanged on Tyburn Hill.

Having sown the wind, and hearing in his ears the oncoming rush of the whirlwind, he vowed to Heaven that if one more chance be granted him he would live peaceably to his life's end. Whether these prayers made in terror reached Heaven, or the Prince of Darkness looked after his own, fortune certainly turned her wheel and meted out long life to a man who seemed to stand on the edge of eternity. For while he waited execution, Queen Mary died, and Elizabeth came to the throne. Furthermore, the time set apart for coronation fell upon the very day that Davenport and his companions were to make their unhappy exit.

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Now, Her Majesty, perchance being wearied by hearing of burnings, hangings, rackings and the like—of which in truth there had of late been no scarcity in England—or else touched by the gladness of the people at her crowning, was not minded that her reign should be ushered in with bloodshed, and graciously pardoned all criminals not actually guilty of murder who were condemned to suffer death on that auspicious day.

She was also pleased to bestow the papers of liberation with her own jewelled hands. When, therefore, this prisoner, Richard Davenport, came into the royal presence, with his fine melancholy face and appealing blue eyes, in which there was no apparent guile, but only a wistful sadness, the young Queen's heart melted with pity, and she turned impulsively to her attendants, saying that here at least some error of Justice must surely have taken place, for if an evil spirit dwelt in so goodly and fair a body, it was for the first time. Furthermore, as the prisoner seemed quite broken-hearted, she desired Lord Burleigh to bestow a purse of five golden rose-nobles upon him that he might begin life anew.

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Following this the prisoners were disbanded, Davenport bowing himself away in graceful humility, yet with no undue self-abasement, and the nine others—who had no straight features or appealing eyes of azure, but for the most part carried the hall-mark of guilt most readably upon them—in a miserable shambling bunch, making for the open frantically, lest by some trick they be overtaken and condemned afresh.

Still more, the Queen bore this lucky scapegrace in mind and desired to have him become a good citizen. Therefore he was given the post of toll-taker on London Bridge—a minor position in the gift of the Crown. But though Richard Davenport found the earth firm beneath him instead of the distressful opposite, his nature was unchanged, and he lived a peaceable life only for policy's sake.

Within a year he married a pretty, timid country lass whose people were simple toilers of the land. She knew nothing of his past, and did not ask to know. It was enough for her that she loved him for his high-handed ways—so unlike any she had known—and for his mastery of herself.

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She was sweet as one of her own garden-roses, but she was a rose transplanted, and the rushing of life over the bridge wore her heart away. The woman grew white and transparent as a spirit, then died, leaving one child—a girl beautiful beyond words, and blessed, as it seemed, with a fine courage, for she feared neither the turmoil of the place nor the fierce and dominating temper of her father. And the little daughter of Davenport was well acquainted with all the haunting sights and sounds of the bridge, for since her starry eyes first opened upon this changeful world these things had been constantly before them, an ever-altering panorama.

After her mother died, the man, tiring of the care of the child, sent her daily to a convent, where she learned out of books both French and Latin, and where her tiny fingers caught the cunning art of tambour embroidery. And the cloistered gray ladies of St. Anne's would gladly have kept her longer, for she brought beauty, youth, and a harmless gayety into their colourless lives. But when Joyce grew old enough to take charge of the house, her father bade her stay at home, and, save for Silas Sloper, a one-legged old sailor

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who did odd work about the place, the two lived quite alone in the toll-house.

It was damp and dark, and filled with the scent of mouldy wine-barrels, for there was a tavern next, a rendezvous for sailors and watermen, where a thriving business was done by one Jock Ferrier in old Burgundy and a certain sweet wine of Spain.

Joyce Davenport was used to the sound of drunken revelries and carousing, yet she grew up as clear of soul and white as one of the little lilies that blossom in the deep marshes where the river widens out, and her face was the one bright, pure thing the sun saw when he looked into the latticed windows of the old toll-house. She was of a sunny nature and very gentle, yet with this gentleness was strangely blended an unbending will. There were times when Davenport wondered why he dare go but certain distance of demand with her, for, though he had broken the spirit of his wife, this little maid of his had power to make him quail by simply looking at him in her still and tranquil way. And, therefore, she made a quiet place for herself in the heart of tumult.

THE MASKED JUGGLER

CHAPTER II

THROUGH the noisy hours of the day the toll-taker was busy and watchful lest some keen and money-saving driver pass by without tendering the city's lawful coin.

He had even before his mind's eye the vision of a better and much coveted position—that of the collector of harbour dues—"the Queen's pin-money" as it was called—from all ships that made anchor at the Billingsgate or Queenhithe quays. To be harbour-master was his keenest ambition, for it entailed little work and much money, both honestly come by and otherwise. No one knew better than himself the "light horsemen" and "felonious stevedores" of the Thames; the "whiskey runners," the "tea skippers," the "rough scullers," "silk smugglers," and all the great flotilla of desperadoes who kept to the silent highways of the river, and defied Sir Thomas Smith, Governor of Customs, and his motley staff of clerks.

"There was gold to be gotten from all of them

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an' a man but knew how—gold—and much of it," he said to himself. So through the day Davenport paid small heed to the comings and goings of his daughter, and she might trip in and out as she would. Provided only that his dinner be set to his liking and she made no delay over it, he asked nothing further, and he gave her many a caress when the mood was on him, and many a rough word when it was not.

But always at even-tide, when traffic grew less, when the tired dray-horses drew their heavy loads toward home, and the little wherrys and punts made fast at their different wharfs; after the great bell of St. Olave's had tolled seven times and the river turned rose-colour in the west; when the diamond window-panes in the windows of the bridge houses and shops showed like cut brilliants, golden and fiery, till they dazzled the eye, then did her father turn the key in the toll-house door, and the little maid was locked in, like a jewel in a rusty casket.

Then, too, came the one-legged sailor, and watched the gate through the long evening, leaving Davenport free to follow his own wild fancies. Generally these led him to those houses among

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the lowest river-streets, a lawless nest of places, where sailors fresh home from a long cruise made haste to rid them of their silver, and where cock-fighting, badger-baiting, and such pastimes were interlarded with much drinking of cheap hot wines and games of chance, in which a man along with the dice took his life in his hands.

At evening the girl would throw wide open the latticed windows that swung back like tiny doors, so the sea-breeze up the river might blow through the house, and, leaning out, she would talk softly to Silas. He was slow of speech, this old sailor-man, and not over-wise, yet of an honest heart and of enough shrewdness withal to let no rider go by without handing down his silver penny. It was his greatest pride to be left in charge of the toll-house and the little lass, and he was much like a gray old watch-dog who, while seeming to sleep, hears each smallest sound.

In idle moments Silas told tales of the sea, and it grew to be the dearest delight of his simple soul to watch the lovely face at the casement grow bright with interest as he spun his yarn out from one thrilling climax to another. It seemed there was no East Indian merchantman, no Portuguese

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carrack, no Spanish galleon sailing the high seas but Silas had been her pilot through scenes of horrid mutiny, bloody piracy, and deadly peril of the deep. There was no coral island of the brilliant southern seas but his craft had beached upon it, no ice-bound silent shore in the Land of the Midnight Sun but he had made a port there at one time or another, and all men who were not Englishmen were barbarians to him, from the cultured foreigners of the distant East to the uncultured foreigners of the distant West. Often afterward would that poor head of his ache sorely, for the resources of his brain were not great, and those flights of fancy exhausted all its strength. Just where truth ended and exaggeration began he did not stop to ask himself; sufficient was it for Silas to see the blue eyes of his young mistress wide with astonishment, and to hear her voice tremble with anxiety as she pleaded to know more of some hardy hero or reckless adventurer.

As time went by she grew tall and passing fair; then there came a day when Richard Davenport suddenly awoke to the fact of her marvellous beauty and all it might mean to him.

Joyce had come to the doorway to call him

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to his mid-day meal; and, standing framed thus in the rough wood, the room dark behind her, she made a picture rare and not to be forgotten. Her hair, which was of a flaxen that seemed touched with silver, waved about her head so light and soft that each breath ruffled it. The delicate brows and curling lashes of her eyes, in strange contrast, were as dark as a Spaniard's, and the eyes themselves deep blue, like the hyacinth flowers that in May grew on the river-bank far away from the city. The Cupid's bow of her mouth was red and sweet, while her face had all the springlike colouring of an apple-blossom.

The russet gown she wore, laced over a yellow bodice, fell open at the throat, and her father saw the warm whiteness of it and the exquisite curves of her rounded arms, for the sleeves were rolled high.

He gave a low exclamation and drew his hand across his eyes as though dazzled.

"What is't, father?" the girl asked. "Art not well?"

"Aye, well enough, lass," he replied half-roughly, following her into the room; "the sun was in my eyes—an' hark'e! keep thee close to

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

the house in future, keep thee close to the house. I will na have thee wandering past the shops, nor to Southwark neither! Dost heed me?"

"I hear thee, father," Joyce replied gently, cutting the rye loaf. "But it seemeth a strange command an' a tiresome one withal. Thou didst ever let me go just as I wished, so I returned by sundown, an' I wandered far, far from the town sometimes, following the river. Hast not seen the marsh-marigolds and brown-eyed Susies I have oft brought back to make the house gay? An' last May-day dost not remember how I went miles and miles to find St.-John's-wort, an' green birch, an' long fennel to hang above the door for luck? Yes, an' I took the ferry to Greenwich last March, for there grow the first catkins. See, then, thou canst not have forgotten, nor the tale I told thee, of how I ran across the Queen's swan-herd a-hunting for the young cygnets, and marking them that they might not stray. Marry, I helped him capture two myself and told thee, yet thou didst not chide."

"Egad! I will do more than chide an' thou goest again," he answered, a dangerous red rising to his face; "so do not bring me to't."

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Joyce stepped round behind his chair and clasped her arms about his throat, for in somewhat she loved the man, and ever her ways were coaxing.

"Give me thy reason, then," she said with a little sigh. "I am no child, father."

"An' that is my reason i' faith. Thou art no longer a child, Mistress Joyce, an' thou art too fair withal. Hast not heard ere this the gossip o' the Queen's Grace? 'Tis a worn story, but curse me if there be not enough wagging tongues to keep it fresh. Gad! sweetheart! in those days I had the devil's own time, an' last of all was run down like a fox to its hole by a scurvy pack of the law's hounds. For no great sin, mark you, no great sin, as I view it; naught the priest would not shrive me for easily enow an' I filled his hand with part o' the booty. See, then, a fox is a fox—he must get his living as best he can." The man shrugged his square shoulders and set his strong white teeth hard in his under lip, then went on. "When things had almost reached their worst, an' we were live men trapped—reckoning to be carrion on the morrow—*they mended.*"

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He rolled some dice softly in his hands and smiled. "So. Dost not know what happened then, small one? Marry! the great Queen is but a woman after all, an' therefore caught through the eye like the rest. 'Twas my *face* brought me the luck o' my life, Joyce, an' thine is more beautiful. It shall bring thee all the things we dream of, aye, sell our souls for. Gold, an' high fortune, an' soft living, an' who knows, lass, a title to thy name, perchance!"

She laughed merrily. "Well, I am content to bide, and thou wilt have it so; but as for gold, I fear me 'twill not come my way, nor high fortune, nor soft living. While as for a title," with a little shake of her head, "as for a title! Heart o' me! count not on *that*, good father," she ended, leaving him.

But there were others who had noted the girl's unusual beauty. Far and wide she was called "The Lily of the Bridge."

How she came by the name was not certain, though some said 'twas old Brother Sebastian, a gentle monk from the ancient Dominican friary near the river, who first called her so. Few of his order were left, for the times had changed.

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Yet a number of them passed the toll-house daily on their errands of mercy, and sometimes even stopped to rest there or ask for a draught of water. It was Brother Sebastian, in his rough, hooded cloak girdled by the knotted rope, and his old face sharp and ivory white from vigils and fastings, who stopped there oftenest. He grew to love Joyce, and wished her away from the keeping of such a dissolute father, for Davenport maintained but an outward semblance of respectability.

Now captured by a new idea, and fancying that in every man he saw one come to rob him of his daughter, the toll-taker guarded her with unreasonable watchfulness.

He called himself a fool for not having seen before what a pearl was in his keeping; what price might not be bidden for it! "There was not the like of Joyce Davenport," he said to himself, "no, not in the kingdom."

Well had his own face served him; and hers—hers should bring him the best the country could give. He would live right merrily yet, and no gentleman of them all would know better how to spend a golden guinea.

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This daughter of his should be seen by the highest in the land, and to see her was to worship her beauty and bid the highest price for it. Therefore, to the highest bidder she should go, to the topmost title and the heaviest purse in all England. 'Twas a game worth playing, one sure of success, as men were the same, old and young, and straightway lost reason for love. A game worth playing. But how to play it? But where? Difficult questions these, and they puzzled the handsome head of Dick Davenport as he stood by the tower through the long autumn day and collected the Queen's tax.

Inside the dark house Joyce pined for liberty. The days were weary, long, and unspeakably lonely. There were the dogs—three of them that she had found at different times wandering about the bridge lost and lean, and as desperately miserable as only homeless dogs can be—these were company, of course. They followed her so closely and watched her with such melancholy eyes, that she fancied they must understand her sad case. And there was her tambour-work, and the books of Latin; yes, and the pigeons that flew to the upper windows. But oh! she longed to

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

be away in the sunshine, longed to escape, and waited in patience and half-stifled hope for some change.

Then one morning there came to the toll-man a thought that struck him as little less than an inspiration. He remembered there was a place near by frequented by the gay and wealthy people of the city. That was an inn on the Southwark side called "The Bear," a resort of fashion even like the Paris gardens, but smaller, and in the grounds behind there was often bull and bear baiting. Ladies sometimes witnessed these sports accompanied by their gallant cavaliers; this was the very place, and Joyce should go with him to see the sights.

"If she does not take the eyes of every man there from the play of the hour," Davenport said to himself, "then the ways of the world have changed."

"Aye, my lass," he cried, swinging the door open suddenly and looking in at his daughter, "thou hast been shut up long enow; to-night will I take thee for an outing to Gillian's Gardens back o' the 'Bear Inn.' Cheer up, then; thou needst some gayety! An' thou'lt have a rare

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pleasant evening. There be hardly a gentleman in England—let alone of the Court—but finds his way to Gillian's soon or late, an' to-night's to be a grand night. Beshrew me if there won't be bear-baiting, and bull-baiting, and dancing! Thou'st seen naught o' life, sweeting, but thy father'll show 'e 'tis worth living."

The girl stood listening with parted lips and quick-coming breath. She leaned back slightly against an old, strangely carved sea-chest—some wreckage washed ashore from Spanish caravel or Italian galley—and with one hand steadied herself against it. The dark background showed the delicate yet unyielding lines of her figure, the silvery aureole of her hair, the colour fading from her face. Her eyes dilated as she listened, and there came by slow degrees an expression on the red mouth that the man knew well and somewhat feared.

"I give thee thanks," she said coldly, "but I will na go. I will na ever go. I am na one who delights in seeing a poor beast tortured. I will bide here in peace."

Davenport swore softly under his breath. Twice before in her life had she answered him with

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the same cool, determined spirit, and he knew her well.

She would not alter or be easily broken. To use force was to ruin the thing he valued; coaxing would not avail, and she was not to be affrighted nor intimidated.

The man turned on his heel muttering a curse, and his face as he went out was white and very evil.

He crossed to a shadowy corner of the tower, where he could watch the gate.

His thoughts were in a tangle, and he raged at such opposition. To be baffled by her, a bit of a lass scarce eighteen. "By the rood!" he said half-aloud, "'twas for the last time."

Gnawing away at his long moustache fiercely, he planned afresh, and, to help these angry meditations, drew from a beaded pouch by his side a heavy pipe and some of that new weed that was worth its weight in silver. Then he smoked in silence. This, like all Davenport's habits, was expensive and grew apace. "Gold was what he wanted and must have," thought the man. As for collecting these paltry tolls—he loathed the task—and the harbour-mastership seemed far

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away as ever. For the girl, if she would not fall in with his wishes, then she should marry Gillian, or Jock Ferrier of the wine-shop next door, for both had wanted to wed her these many months and had been kept at arm's-length with infinite trouble. "Dave Gillian"—he gave a short laugh—"there was a chuckle-head with a dull brain and a long purse, keeper and whole owner of the fashionable bear-garden! 'Twould answer an' she be obstinate. Peradventure 'twould be even a better choice than Ferrier, who was keen-witted, over-bold, and dissipated, though freer with his money. But he'd wait—he'd wait." So he stood thinking and savagely pulling at his pipe.

Presently came Silas to go on duty.

"There be rare doin's at t'other end o' bridge, maister," he called. "Rare doin's! There be a crowd gathered as I came by!"

"What's to do?" asked Davenport sullenly.

"There be a juggler all dressed in brown cordovan leather, flecked with little gold tassels where 'tis laced. Zooks! but he tosseth knives till it maketh t' blood stiffen in one! And there be red hoops an' ivory balls he throws as well; an' he doeth magic with a silken ribbon, maister,

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tying it in knots no sailor ever saw, and straightening it by a charm."

"'Tis a tame show, and one fit for women," said the other indifferently.

"Tame show or no," returned the sailor, "it chilled the marrow o' my bones to see him toss the long knives, and catch them when five were falling tines down!

"But there be more to it," he half-whispered, leaning toward Davenport. "He weareth a brown mask, and they do say 'tis some *noble* in disguise. Beshrew me but he looketh like one, for he standeth full a head over any man around, and hath the strength of ten in him! The show be'th on till dark, so thou canst see for thyself!"

"Ah, so?" said Davenport. "'Tis a strange tale; and yet I doubt me but what the fellow is some banished Court-jester. Hark'e! Thou talkest over-much, seest over-much, an' hearest over-much. Attend to thy business, and there'll be short time for thee to gaze open-jawed at some juggling fool or another till thy wry neck hath a creak in it. Be not late again or I'll settle with thee."

Thus saying, he went indoors and sat heavily down.

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Then a thought suddenly came to him. "Perchance," he said to himself eagerly, "an' I take the lass to see this fellow—it might bring her to easier mood! They be odd things, women, an' changeable as an April day. That far, an' who knows? Mayhap a bit of coaxing, larded with soft words, might lead her on to the Gardens, then I'll leave the rest with my beruffled lord of this or that. 'Tis worth trying, but it goeth against the grain." Rising, he settled his doublet and made up his mind to act on the impulse.

His little daughter was in her room looking down into the river and watching a soft, yellow mist that, smokelike, rolled in from the sea.

"Ah, Joyce!" she heard him call half-gently. "I was harsh with thee; come, I will take thee for a stroll, sweeting. At bridge end is a fine show, they tell me, a sight that maidens may see, for 'tis just harmless juggling—no more nor less. Put on thy best gown, lass, to out walk with thy father, an' in token that thy temper is fair again."

Joyce answered back gayly, and soon ran down from her room arrayed in a white cloth gown,

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and with a long cloak of hunter's green tied about her throat. She pulled up the hood, and dropped her father a little courtesy.

"'Tis all the bravery I own," she said, "but 'twill serve."

"Aye," he answered. "Thou lookest like a lily coming out o' green leaves."

So unhappiness was banished, and laughing and chatting they walked down the bridge, past the quaint bridge-houses with their tiny roof-gardens bright with flowers, and in and out among the people.

The odd signs above the old shops swung rustily back and forth with low creaking, while the air was full of sounds of life, and fresh with a salt smell from the sea. Under the narrow arches the river surged and beat. Vessels from ports near and far passed up and down the dusky water, that at this hour was touched with gold and red from the western sun. There was a certain infectious gaiety in the air, for the people rested after the busy day, and the sailors sang their rondeaus, or whistled and called to the idlers on the bridge.

Great trading-ships were making ready to go

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

out at full tide; some to the old mysterious East, others to the new golden West, a few, perhaps, to the still, white North. Little wherries and punts went bustlingly back and forth with a great to-do for things so small. State barges with high gilded prows passed by, taking companies of Court gentlemen to Greenwich, and life aboard them was a bright-coloured thing set to much music and laughter. Many sails, either painted a vivid carmine or yellow, or left the way the weather had shaded them to black, brown, or tawny, were raised in the freshening evening breeze.

Here and there the swans drifted homeward, like patches of floating snow. Down to the lower marshes they went, where was quiet and deep peace. Out on the docks a day's work was drawing in, and weary 'longshoremen wheeled the last wine-casks from fast-emptying vessels, or piled heavy chests of tea, curiously marked bales of foreign silks and rugs, or boxes of spice, into shelter for the night.

All this Joyce saw as she had seen it times without number. The wind blew in many a fragrant odour from the ships being unloaded,

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

and a perfume of wine and leather, sandal-wood, coffee, and tobacco, all blended with the scent of the sea.

Away yonder stood the gray old Tower amid its silvery shadows, raising its grim head to heaven, and holding inviolate the secrets of the years. No word did it give to the people of those whose hearts had been broken, or of those others who had been "put to silence" within its walls—but it stood as one who waits. The sun touched the ancient priory of St. Mary Overies, gilded the spires of the convent of Bermondsey, and there was but an after-glow lighting up the world as the two came upon a knot of sight-seers circling about the man Dick Davenport sought.

Yes, there he was, the mysterious juggler, still playing for the amusement of the passing throng, and, doubtless, the better filling of his own wallet.

He stood on a small cedar table, where lay an open case of long double-edged foreign knives, and he was—as Davenport noticed—a good head taller than any man around.

As for his dress, it was sober brown, cut withal in the extreme fashion of the hour, and it followed the lines of his firmly knit form as

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

though moulded upon it. His boots of soft tan colour rose to the mid-thigh, and were square and flaring at the top. His jerkin of leather, also, shone here and there where it was laced, with little gilt tassels, as the old sailor had said. He was belted with a girdle of dull gold, from which dangled a small toylike Venetian dagger. The hilt of this pretty thing glinted blue, as though set thick with turquoise. The linen at the man's throat and wrist was smooth and fair, testifying to the ease with which he wrought his work. Upon his short, dark hair rested a jaunty peaked cap, holding one long pheasant's feather.

The pose of the player as he kept some ivory balls in midair was grace itself; still, it was his face the people watched, for there lay the mystery of him. His lower jaw, strong and beautifully turned, was shaven clean; the mouth, firm and close, showed yet the faint indication of a smile, but across his eyes lay a mask, and none might say truly who looked from behind it.

An ancient serving-man waited near the table holding a heavy cloak. The expression on the worn face was one of patience under great distress of mind. He it was who collected the silver

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

sixpences, groats, and threepenny bits after each performance—often from a fast-thinning crowd—and in truth his looks bespoke it a vastly unwelcome task.

Davenport pushed through the mass of people to its innermost circle, holding Joyce fast by the cloak, so that she must needs follow.

They drew up just as the juggler stooped to take his knives from their case.

Next the girl stood a sailor all agape; a bare-foot, swarthy fellow he was, with hair burned almost yellow from the tropic sun. On one arm he held a wooden cage wherein were two homesick paroquets that now and then uttered harsh, unhappy cries. Next again was a youth of most noble deportment, whose keen eyes missed nothing of interest that passed around him, and his boyish mouth changed as he gazed about at the motley crowd with a smile, now grave, now whimsical.

All this Joyce saw in a dream, for she was only conscious of one tall and beautiful figure clad from top to toe in sombre hue, flinging from him straight and high into the air a dozen glittering, dangerous knives.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

She watched him breathlessly with eyes darkening, the pink coming and going in her cheeks, her hands clinging together till the rosy nails grew white. From her raised head the green hood slipped away, and in the golden evening light her hair made an aureole about her face. The handsome boy near by glanced at her again and again as one impressing a picture upon the memory. She stood as still as a lily in a windless garden, fascinated by the danger of the play going on.

One little slip, one breath too much, ah! The juggler glanced down and his eyes caught the girl's uplifted face. There was a quiver of his arm, and then a shower of knives rattled on the wooden table or fell to the bridge.

Three he caught, and one grazed his cheek, or even more, for the blood streamed down upon his collar.

Joyce gave a low, half-checked cry, and pulling her kerchief out of its swinging pocket held it up.

"Quick! Thy face!" she said; "bind it up; oh, bind it up! Thou art welcome to the kerchief; I need it not."



"SHE STOOD FASCINATED BY THE DANGER OF THE PLAY."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Then turning to her father, she caught his hand. "Take me home," she said. "Take me home with thee; I like not such sights. Didst not see? He might have been *blinded* for life."

The juggler had leaned down and taken the tiny lace-edged square, which he pressed to his face. Now he leaped lightly from the table and stood beside Joyce.

"I give thee thanks; but trouble not thy pretty head about me, little maid," he said. "Had I put out my life, 'twere a ne'er-do-weel gone, and not a better man."

Some voice in the crowd called out, "Go on with thy show, Sir Juggler! 'Tis not thy death-wound this time," and there was much chattering and laughter.

"I warrant 'tis not as deep as the Thames at low-water," called another, "yet 'twill keep thy head cool, an' save from leeching."

"I trow 'twill make but a paltry scar," sneered a rough voice. "Finish thy show, knave. Art turned chicken-hearted?"

The green paroquets set up a screaming like files over a saw.

Then the youth who stood next the sailor

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

looked quietly around, and the hum of voices ceased.

"Pray thee, go to thy homes, good citizens," he said in a rich, far-reaching voice. "There will be no more knife-throwing to-night; the light has failed, see you? Hast never heard this, 'He jests at scars who never felt a wound.' " So, laughing, he made his way through the people.

" 'Tis young Will Shakespeare!" said one, looking after the man. "A player from the Globe."

" 'Tis Will Shakespeare, none else," answered another.

Thus they scattered noisily and went away as the dusk fell.

Davenport and his daughter had long disappeared, as had the juggler, while the old serving-man folded the table by some contrivance and carried it toward Bridge House.

DAVENPORT'S DECISION. WHAT
THE BELL-MAN SAW FROM
THE BRIDGE

CHAPTER III

JOYCE sat long at her window after her father had locked the outer door and gone to his favourite haunts.

Persuasions had failed to change the girl's mind. She would not go to the bear-baiting. Then Davenport had named other places of fashion and amusement where the crowd was mixed from all classes. Chief among them was the "Knave of Clubs," a popular inn on Bridge Street, which owned a ballroom waxed and polished till it fairly mirrored the dancers. There might she learn to trip a coranto or galliard with the best of them, he said. But Joyce shook her head and would not listen. So he had gone out, muttering oaths between clinched teeth.

Now she was alone, watching the moon rise. Up it came between the violet-tinted clouds, softly luminous, unsubstantial, almost as though it were a big golden bubble floating out of the

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

brown water. It transfigured the dingy places by the river-side, tipped with silver the Tower turrets, and shone pityingly upon the woful burdens raised on the spiked southern gates of the bridge. Two there were, looking stonily outward with unseeing eyes.

The girl leaned into the sweet, dewy darkness, listening to a night-bird calling with mournful insistence. Now and again a little chill went over her; that was when she fancied she saw a knife fall with desperate swiftness; down it came and glanced across a man's masked face turned toward her!

Life seemed to have come to a stop with Joyce Davenport. The past was nothing; the future less. To live was only to see again, if but for a moment, that gracious figure all in dusky brown; to hear him speak.

"Trouble not thy pretty head about me, little maid," he had said. Oh, vain warning! for what else was there in all the world to think or dream of?

She chided herself grievously for having been over-bold in giving him her kerchief; then smiled at the thought that he had it still.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

By-and-by, as these things went through her mind, she suddenly remembered that there was the kerchief to be *returned*. 'Twas a dainty one, and broidered with little lilies. Then would she see him; or no—peradventure 'twould be the aged serving-man who would bring it. And her father might meet him and bid him about his business; or, worse still, might he not come himself—*to-night*—even while she was dreaming thus—and seeing none about the toll-house but old Silas, leave the kerchief with him, and so depart? 'Twas over-late for that, perchance, for the moon was now above the Tower; yet she would away to the bridge to speak with the old sailor.

Swiftly she slipped through the dark rooms; then, throwing back the window, called softly.

Silas was dozing against the gate, even, indeed, snoring unmelodiously from time to time; but he heard the girl's voice instantly, and started toward her, his peg-leg making an echoing thud at each step.

"How now, mistress," he said, "is aught wrong?"

"No, no! nothing is amiss," she answered;

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"but prithee tell me, good Silas, hast seen to-night a tall man, in high riding-boots with battlemented tops, brown jerkin, and hat with pheasant's feather? Think quickly, good Silas."

The sailor rubbed his eyes, yawned, and then pulled at his frowsy forelock.

"Art sure 'twas a pheasant's feather?" he asked.

"Yes, yes!" she said, leaning toward him; "an' thou couldst not mistake him for another in truth; he is vastly tall and most comely. He hath a clean-shaven chin with a dimple fair in the centre. Rememberest thou now, Silas?"

"Art sure of the dimple?" asked he laboriously.

"Oh, quite, quite sure, dear Silas! It is a dimple not to be forgotten. Pray thee, tell me if he spoke to thee and what he said."

"I saw him not," answered the old man, smiling to himself in the dark. "An' thoust best to bed, Mistress Joyce. 'Tis not for thee to be thinking of dimples in a man's chin. Gadzooks! thy father'd make short work o' him an' he crossed *his* path. Knowst thou not why he keeps thee so close, sweeting?"

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Nay, I know not. Tell me, then, Silas. I can guess no good reason, though my head aches with thinking."

"Why, then, he'd marry thee to some fine gentleman. Thou art not for every market. Dost never look in thy copper mirror, lass? There are no such eyes as thine in England!"

"Thou art talking nonsense, good Silas! Where hast thou been to see the Court beauties? Marry, then, but the Queen herself—though she be not over-young—is most marvellous fair. I' faith, an' I had a few jewels and a silken gown, I would pass; thinkst thou not so? But, alas! I have naught but one gown of russet an' one of white."

"Thou mayst have more yet. Aye, farthingales an' fluted ruffs, an' strings o' pearls, an' such falderals as the gentles wear, all when thy ship comes in. An' when thou be'st stiff with gold lace, an' bedecked so grandly, peradventure thou'lt forget Silas, who would give the last bit of timber in his old hulk just to serve thee. Wilt forget him, lass?"

"Never, good Silas, never, should such a time come! But hast thou seen——?"

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Well-a-day!" Silas broke in. "I trow thou wilt not, for thou hast a true heart. Didst hear of the great funeral on the morrow? 'Twill be the last of the old Earl of Oxford."

"Speak not of funerals to-night. I like not the subject."

"An' why not, then? 'Tis to be a comely show, sweet mistress. Seven score of nobles follow i' horseback, all in black velvet—belted knights, an' knights of the garter, an' knights of I know not what—an' four-and-seventy foot-mourners come behind, one for each year of his life, all of 'em bearing staff-torches. An' then the yeomen of the guard, an' all the royal barge-men. 'Twill be a pretty show, I gainsay. Ask thy father to let me take thee, for thou needst some pleasure at thy time o' life.

"'Twill run through Fleet Street, an' so round about to Westminster, where all the bishops an' mitred abbots in England will meet it, let alone the Queen's scholars and the choristers from St. Paul's!"

"Prithee be still, good Silas. Seest thou not a man yonder half in shadow? I fancy he wear-eth high boots with battlemented tops. Ah, he

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

cometh this way! An' he asks *aught*, answer him civilly an' thou desirest to please me."

Joyce drew back her flaxen head and held her breath to listen.

Presently she heard a voice, the voice of the one who had thrown the knives, speaking to the sailor. There was a tone in it that brought the old man to an attitude of attention. He feared his master, but dare not disobey this stranger. They turned together to the window, and Silas looked within.

"Art there, Mistress Joyce?" he said half-sullenly. "Here be one who must have a word with thee; leastwise, would not be denied. Heaven send he be quick over it; thy father is not pleasant company when he returneth late."

The girl looked out and saw behind Silas the graceful figure of the juggler. He wore no mask, and in the moonlight his face was white like marble, and the long cut showed plainly from cheek to chin.

"Thou hast led me a dance, little maid," he said laughingly; "I hunted thee up hill and down dale. By my faith thou art worth it! Come, tell me, why didst thou gaze at me so to-day?"

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Thine heart was looking through those wondrous blue eyes, and it set me a-tremble so that my knives went down like a shower of devils. By the saints! I am not one to be so easily over-set, but would bank on tossing them before Queen Bess, herself, without a nerve quaking."

Leaning against the casement, he covered the girl's small hands boldly with his own. "Look not so at me, an' thou wouldst have me keep a cool head, little maid. I am but mortal."

"Who art thou?" she said softly.

"Did I not tell thee then?" answered the man with his odd smile. "A ne'er-do-weel, as they of the North country say. A sport of Fortune, otherwise, one who had no fairy godmother at his christening, and so perforce missed the charm that might have held off evil. One who lived unwisely; a spendthrift who crowded the sweets of threescore years and ten into thirty, thereby hurting himself more than others; and one withal who has sown as fine a crop of wild oats for his own reaping as any gentle—as any fellow in England."

"Hast done evil deeds?" she asked with a quiver in her voice. "Is that why thou wearst

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

the mask? If so, master juggler, why comest thou to me?"

"Ah!" he answered warmly, looking down at her, "perchance I come because thou art the very opposite of all I am or ever will be. I believe not that like attracts like, but rather the reverse. Moreover, I could not banish thy face. I who at will have banished all thought and care along with the faces of those I wished not to remember! Retribution may have overtaken me at last and printed thy face upon my heart to haunt me always. Marry! I saw more than thine eyes looking up at me through the yellow light—I saw thy soul. Peradventure 'tis but to ask thy prayers I come to-night. Thinkst thou so?"

"Nay, I know not," she said with a little troubled sigh, "though truly they are thine, whether thou wouldst have them or not. But tell me, hast been so very wicked? Hast ever killed a man?"

The juggler gave a short laugh, and his face, bold, dare-devil, half-tender, bent toward her.

"Aye," he said, "that have I—three of them! I would I could have answered thee differently, but—this for my forgiveness—'twas done in fair

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

duelling, the chances being counted equal, though, unhappily, I was the better swordsman. At times men have no other road out of a difficulty, and at the worst 'tis a short and easy cut to death. Listen, then. I am like the prodigal son in this much, that I have journeyed into far countries and spent my substance in riotous living. 'A short life and a merry one.' 'Tis the song of the green-coat in the grass, and I have joined him at it. As for my sins, put down all those thou canst think of—save that of breaking faith—and thou wilt have a fair sum of them."

"I will think no evil of thee," she said simply. "An' dost not remember 'twas he who so journeyed into the far country that came home again and was forgiven? And now, sir, go; my father wishes not to have me awake when he returns."

"Dost fear what he will say and he finds me by thy window?"

"Nay," answered Joyce, "I have done no wrong; why should I fear? But go thou *quickly*, for truly he is a dangerous man to meet at times, and I fear for *thee*."

"Thou art the sweetest maid in England," said

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

the man passionately, "and I will surely see thee to-morrow."

"No, no!" she cried, throwing out her hands in protest. "Indeed, no; I am over-busy in the afternoon."

"Aye, so am I, for I ride to the Duke's funeral——"

"Then thou art a noble," she said with quick thought.

"Dost think so?" he answered smiling. "After what I told thee? Why, what is't to be noble, then, little maid? So I will tarry no longer, while I fain would. Methinks," with a shrug, "this again is foreign to my nature. Hitherto I have tarried where I would, by daylight or starlight, where I would, with permission of the law or without it, as it happed. Egad! In this mood I have scant acquaintance with myself."

He leaned over and touched her hands lightly with his lips. "Thou art very beautiful," he said, looking up at her. "Have many told thee so?"

The girl gave a little low laugh. "Marry, yes," she said, "a few. My father, an' Silas, the old sailor who takes the night-tolls, an' Brother Sebastian, a time-worn monk from the Dominican

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

friary, when he was here, but he hath now gone to France. Yes, an' Dave Gillian, an' Jock Ferrier, though I would not listen."

"Who are they, the last two?" said the man, swinging toward her.

She gave a slight shiver.

"I care not to speak of them; they be my father's friends, not mine."

He smiled in the dark.

"Then thou needst not speak," he said. "But, remember, I shall see thee on the morrow, come rain or shine, for I am without the virtue of patience. Fare thee well till then, and dream not of falling daggers—or yes, thou mayst; for then by the Saints' grace thou wilt dream of *me*."

Down the bridge he went, with light, buoyant step, and the girl watched him till he passed into the gloom beyond, then sighed, and pressed her two hands against her heart.

"I wish not to have him return," she said, "an' yet I do; never have I seen such another, for all he doth so belittle himself. Ah me! twice have I heard of the Duke's funeral within an hour, and methinks 'twas a bat that flew above our heads as we talked. I like not such sorry omens."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Twelve struck, and as Joyce listened, three men came past the bridge-tower, arms locked to keep themselves upright. Occasionally the one in the centre would crumple down and, after a parley, be taken onward again. They sang in different key, but with apparent enjoyment, an old hunting-song:

“Come, merry, merry gentlemen,
An' haste thee all away,
For we will hunt the jolly, jolly fox
At breaking o' the day.”

The listener knew well whose high tenor it was that held the sweet top notes. She closed the window and waited.

Presently there was the sound of Silas sleepily greeting the toll-taker.

“Is't thou, good Master Davenport? Odso! 'Tis high time; my bones are warped with waiting in the wind for thee, an' ache to the marrow. Keep thee on thy legs, then; thou hast no more stiffening in thee than a rag o' sea-weed. Thou'lt sleep i' thy boots to-night. Nay, hang not on my neck, but port thy helm an' steer straight. Marry! thy doublet's in sorry plight—ne'er lace nor tag to it, an' thou never worst that rolled-

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

brim hat away; some knave hath thine, I'll warrant, an' the best o' the bargain. Steady then, maister. Ste-ady then; breakers ahead! Mind thee, 'tis but a peg on my weather-side, an' t'other one, starboard leg, 's a bit bowed out. Ste-ady then!"

So they lumbered in, the door shut sharply, and while the old sailor latched it, Joyce sought her room with fast-beating heart and misty eyes.

"I owe him naught," she thought bitterly, "neither respect nor obedience, though I would 'twere possible to give him both."

Next night when the world grew quiet the juggler came to the little shadowy window, and again old Silas listened to voices fresh and sweet, and brimming over with a melody of youth.

So it went till two weeks had gone by. Ever the old sailor saw his mistress come to the casement after the dark fell, and wait for one who never failed her.

But there came a night when, after the tall, brown figure had gone, another came—one bent and spare—yet nervously quick in movement. He glided from out the shadow, and went stealthily toward the toll-house; then stopped, looking

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

up and down. Seeing the sailor near by, he crossed to him and touched him on the arm.

"I would speak with Mistress Joyce Davenport—she who talked with my master but lately."

"'Tis not an hour for any to speak with her," said Silas gruffly. "I like not these doings, neither thy master's nor thine. I know him for the thrower of balls and knives at bridge-foot. Marry, I would end it an' I had the heart; the little lass says naught, but she looketh at me with eyes that plead. Yet I would *kill* him an' he played her false. 'Tis a very coil. Best get thee gone. See you! an' the toll-man happens home early to-night, the devil's own temper'll bear him company."

"I fear not, an' indeed 'tis not near the stroke of eleven. I pray thee call thy mistress. Thou art no judge of my need to see her. Good master toll-man, I pray thee!"

Silas noted the trembling voice and saw by a flickering link at the gate that the old face was drawn and sharp with some intense feeling.

"Bide thee under yon gable, then, an' I will call the lass. But I be an old fool for my pains. Still, an' thou make not short work, I will shut the casement."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"As short as I can, Heaven knows," answered the other, "but 'twill take a little time."

Joyce came again hastily, fearing she knew not what. From the velvet hood over her head her face looked out, white and flower-like, and a candle she held, shaded by one hand, threw shadows up and over it.

"This one also," said the sailor, with a jerk of his thumb backward, "would have a word with thee. 'Tis coming to a pass. Bid him be quick. I want no broken heads to bind when thy father comest back."

The girl saw a thin, dark form and a head of snowy hair worn in a queue; then she blew out the light.

"Thou art Mistress Joyce Davenport?" said the man nervously.

"Aye," she answered, "I am the toll-master's daughter."

"They call thee hereabouts 'The Lily of the Bridge,' and by vastly good right."

Joyce put her hands to her ears and laughed lightly.

"Go to! go to! good gentleman. Thou art surely past making pretty speeches. 'Tis late.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

I would be through an' to my room. Hast any word of import? If not—ah!—is't so, then? I do remember now. Thou art he who stood by the table of knives—is't not so? Speak on, quickly. Hast brought a message?"

"No message, sweet lady, but in truth a word of import. My master hath been here each night for two weeks, as I count; sometimes but for a little space, again for longer. He doth not be-fool old Michael. He hath made love to thee, thou canst not deny it."

The lovely face in the hood grew rosy. "Try not my patience," she said; "thy business had best not touch such matters."

"Nevertheless, I spoke truth. He hath made love to thee, and thou—thou hast bewitched him till I know him not. Now, hark'e! Dost know the name of him who stands on London Bridge at sundown and juggles for the people's sport?" A ring of suppressed wrath sounded in the words. "Hath he acquainted thee with his *name*, good Mistress Davenport?"

The man could see two little hands cling to the wooden sill, tight, tight.

"Aye, I know his name," she answered,

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"though he told me not. Look you, I saw the passing of the great Duke's funeral, and the gentles who followed clothed in black velvet. Thy master rode with them, unmasked. One near me in the crowd pointed to him jestingly and said, 'Yonder goes the young Lord of Yelverton, who hath squandered more gold crown pieces and rose-nobles than any dandy of them all, from London to Land's End.' 'Twas so I learned thy master's name, good sir."

"Dost know, then, why he playeth by the south tower?"

"Nay!" she cried with soft eagerness. "Nay, tell me, I pray thee; 'tis best I should know."

"Listen, then," answered the man, with a quick glance around. "He thou knowest as the juggler is indeed the young Lord of Yelverton. Soft, I would not be overheard, and the watch cometh by. Now, again, 'tis also true he hath played fast and loose with two goodly fortunes. See you, when he came of age there were none to advise or control. 'Twas in this wise: My lord and my lady—Heaven rest them—died within a short space of each other, leaving no lawful guardian for the lad. There was not one in

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

England near of kin, therefore the Crown appointed Lord Dudley to the care of the young master and estates. My lord troubled but little over the matter, and the lad grew up without control of any, a bit wild, yet sweet in temper. When at one-and-twenty he came to his own (an' there were vast lands in France as well, for my lady had been a French woman), he made short work of all the gold that had been storing for his pleasure.

"I canst not tell thee how it went, but 'twas like water through a sieve, or sand through the fingers. The whole world was his friend then, though perchance none cared for him, for himself alone, but just old Michael.

"The lad had ever been ungovernable save by his mother's gentleness, and there were plenty to lead him from her memory. It went like a fairy-tale, Mistress Davenport, for my master was as much at home in France as England, and everywhere had a gay company at his heels. He lived like a prince of the blood, and when the foreign moneys were spent, saddled the home estates with grievous debt. When all went the same road, he shipped to America with some

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

of Sir Walter Raleigh's men, I following ever.

"'Twas upon that long voyage that my lord learned from a queer Indian fellow of the East—brown-limbed and supple as willow—the curious tricks of throwing balls and knives—aye, an' many another folly which goeth for magic. 'Twas a pastime when the sea lay like a blue mirror, and the sun warmed idle sails and a quiet deck."

The old servant stopped breathlessly and drew his hand across his eyes as though to dispel some vision.

"Have patience, sweet lady. The story is hard to unravel. We returned again to England after a year of wandering in the strange New World, an' 'tis *now* thou needst listen. Not long since came word that an old friend of Lord Yelverton's father, one Frazer of Dundee (a dour man, an' o'er-strange in many ways), *was dead*, an' had bequeathed half his mighty hoard of wealth to my master. Ah! but there it did not end. There were *conditions*, mark you."

The trembling voice broke, and in the pause came the sound of Joyce Davenport's heart beat-

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

ing quick, quick, like a bird against cage-bars.

“Full well did old Frazer of Dundee know my Lord Harry and his spendthrift ways. The conditions were these, therefore, as the man-of-law read, I listening also :

“ ‘When Lord Henry Yelverton, by the craft of his hand, earneth twenty golden guineas in the space of one month, then shall he enter into full possession of half the land and moneys mentioned in the said will; provided, also, that he wed upon the same day the niece of Donald Frazer (who was also his ward).’

“This, Mistress Davenport, read the man-of-law in my hearing, with much mouthing of words that have slipped my memory. My young lord laughed long, and as at a jest when he heard. ‘I have a craft, sir lawyer,’ he said, ‘an honest one in sooth, whereby I can earn the gold right merrily if so be Michael will but pass around his chapeau. But I doubt me ’tis such an one as would have pleased the sainted Scot.’

“ ‘No special craft is specified in the document,’ said the man-of-law.

“ ‘Then was I born under a lucky star! But

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

the maid! Beshrew me! Why did he throw in the maid? Couldst not have put in a word to save a man? I beseech thee, sweet lawyer, draw me her picture. An' it be not to my liking, I'd let the King's crown go by before I'd wed her.' These, fair lady, were his very words."

Joyce gave a little laugh and caught the old man's arm.

"Said he so?" she cried. "Art sure?"

"Aye, an' that was a short month back. He hath earned the *gold*, but he hath also *seen thee*.

"But yestere'en said he thus to me, in all earnestness, 'The game is up, my trusty Michael, and I am where I was before.' "

"Be quick," she said breathlessly. "I see a shadow yonder. Mayhap the watch returneth, or thou hast wearied Silas, or 'tis my father."

"Have patience," he panted. "This said my master: 'There is no heart left in me to go to Scotland and wed old Frazer's ward. A plague on him for throwing in the maid. 'Twould plant a thorn in every golden rose-noble of them all. Nay, then, I will not wed her, for my heart hath found its heritage here on London Bridge; a pearl, Michael, washed up by old Father Thames,

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that all the world passed by unseeing. And 'tis the little maid of Davenport that may be my Lady of Yelverton an' she will, though there be not a groat behind the title.'

"See, then, mistress, 'tis on thy pity I throw myself. Take him not at his word. Indeed, 'twould be his undoing. Dost not understand 'tis the turn of the tide with him now? With the Scottish wealth all debts could be wiped away from the old castle, and the name kept pure in England. And thy father, knowest thou not he lived but by the grace of the Queen? He is a *felon*, though free. 'Tis a marriage not to be entertained, even if in truth he meant his words. Is it not enough that he play to the people, while I scorn the money I take? Have pity, sweet lady, for I know his moods. He is in deadly earnest to-day, an' *thou only canst save him*. An' thou turnst him off lightly, then perchance will he away to the North country and trouble be ended."

"Go," she said, looking out into the old, white, eager face. "I will not answer thee now; it needeth thought. My father speaketh with Silas at the gate. Hasten, hasten!"

Presently Davenport came stumbling to the

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door. He called in quick, angry fashion for Joyce.

"Who is it that talkst with thee after I be away? Hark'e, make no excuse."

"It is my Lord of Yelverton," answered the girl in her soft way. "Hast aught against him, father? Thou dost know his name surely; 'tis an old one in the country."

"Lord Yelverton!" he said thickly. "Is't so? Dost mean it? How camest thou to meet one of title? Thou hast been a caged beauty of late, also."

"Thou knowst I never speak aught but truth," she said gravely.

"Aye, little one, thy word is thy bond always, but report said 'twas the brown juggler at bridge-foot who had found thee out." Then his face changing: "In any case, 'twill not do, Mistress Joyce; 'twill not do; Yelverton hath not a sou to his title. There is Gillian. See thou dost not turn him away when he comes on the morrow. He is a good fellow, though no gentle. Speak him fair, I bid thee. He is rich—Dave Gillian—rich, rich. As for this spendthrift young noble—hast made love to thee, sweetheart?"

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"I' faith," answered the girl, "he spoke somewhat of love."

"An' asked thee to marry him, I'll swear? If I could afford time, I couldst wed thee to the greatest of them all. He asked thee to marry him, then, did he, lass?"

"Peradventure," she said with a laugh that ended in a sob. Then turning, she threw her arms about the man's throat, with a sudden soft violence that half-sobered him. "Oh, father," she cried, "I desire not to marry any one of them if thou wilt but be kind an' have me bide with thee. Let us away from London Bridge. I am weary of the crowd ever going by, an' of the endless noise an' turmoil. The bridge is worn and breaking; soon will the Queen have it rebuilt grandly, so say the gossips. I am weary, weary of it—of the sights of it—and the dreadful heads blackening in the sunlight. Thou mayst not *always* have the toll-house. Let us away, then, *now*, to some quiet place; to the new country, dear father. The ships pass out at morning and evening. Oh, say thou wilt go with thy little Joyce, an' speak no more of marrying."

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Davenport shook her away, but half comprehending the drift of her words.

"Tut, tut!" he said. "Thou art gone daft; an' thou always wert a strange maid. To thy bed and rest, to thy bed and rest!"

The girl went slowly away to her room and stood looking out at the wide, dark river, dappled here and there with silver from the late rising moon. Down her face fell a rain of tears, unheeded, and she pressed her hand against her heart to still its heavy beating. A deadly despair crept over her, numbing all clear thought, all possible reasoning. She was as a fly caught in a web, and that has given over fluttering its wings. Her father had reached the limit of his temper; to-morrow would find him ready to do as he promised. He had been dicing heavily of late and losing. The old restless longing for a free life of his own wild choosing was upon him again, and maddened him by day and night. He would brook no more defiance to his will, no more delay.

She stood there by the window, a slender, unwavering figure, with hands clasped tightly behind. Now and then a tremor ran through her

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which, passing, left her stiller than before. The hours struck from the big solemn bell in St. Paul's, and by-and-by the city slept save where the angels of birth or death hovered, or where crime held carnival.

"There is no other way," she said at last, half-aloud, "yet I would, I would there were. Dave Gillian!" with a catch in her breath, "Dave Gillian! Oh, I needed not that! To-morrow night at nine o' the clock will he come again, my Lord of Yelverton, an' I might go with him an' I would. Nay, 'twould be but a selfish love an' I went. I can remember his words, though I understand them not: 'Two roads lie before me, little maid: one dark and tiresome, even monotonous to desperation; the other through a green country, where the air is golden an' the sky the shade of thine eyes. Thou wilt be by my side there, an' if joy comes, 'twill be greater with thee to share it; an' if sorrow, then I'll take thy part as well as my own. So, sweetheart, 'tis a fair journey lies in that direction. Wouldst throw in thy lot with a strolling juggler who hath but love to give thee?' "

No, no! There was no time for thought, and

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'twas needless, for her mind was firmly set. Love was not love that harmed the thing it worshipped; yet, all possibility of life in the old house by the north tower was over.

Tying the green cloak about her, she went silently down the leaning stairs, through the quiet room and out into the darkness. One of the dogs followed, a small, tangle-haired thing with eyes great and melancholy.

The moon was sinking. Joyce stood looking at it all, her hands clasped, her head thrown back.

"'Tis a beautiful, beautiful world," she said, as though to the small dog pressing his rough head against her gown. "Methinks 'tcould not be fairer, even beyond—" Then, stooping, she petted the trembling animal. "Thou art a good little friend," she said, "a good little friend, in sooth. But thou canst not bear me company to-night. Nay, plead not. I will not let thee come. Away to thy corners, away, away!"

The girl watched till he turned toward the house in sad perplexity, whimperingly and with little speed.

The bridge was quiet now and almost deserted; here and there a shadowy form of belated traveller

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on horse or afoot flitted by, half-stealthily as it seemed, out of the gloom and into the deeper gloom again.

No twinkling candle shone from the house windows, but on the bridge-towers flamed the dying links. A speck of red light swaying here and there in the distance showed where the watch went by.

The lapping of the river against the piers, and in and out among the great half-broken sparlings, sounded strangely loud and mournful, as it never did by day.

The old bridge bell-man—he who rang the south-tower bell at high tide, that the ships going to sea might lose no minute to their advantage—stood alone leaning against one of the low stone parapets and watching the water. For years he had been about the bridge, and there was no hour of the night or day, so the people gossiped, that he might not be discovered between Southwark side or London just looking out on the river. Some said it had stolen his wits away, the ebb and flow of it, and that at full of the moon he was quite mad. But it was not so. He was wise in his day and generation, the old bell-man, and,

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seeing much, said little. Albeit he was a firm old Puritan, who gloried too greatly in taking no pleasure out of life, and who remembered and muttered to himself at times too many of the anathemas written by David, King of Israel.

He started, half-afraid, as Joyce went swiftly by him in her fluttering white gown, for at first he thought it was a spirit. The spirits of those whose bodies lay in the river or were floated out to sea often haunted the place in the little hours, so report said. Still, one had never startled him before, so chiding his fancies and with a sudden tightening of the heart as at a presentiment of evil, he followed the white figure, closer and closer, slipping from shadow to shadow noiselessly.

Not far off there were some steps unsteady with age and worn in hollows that led to the water.

These the girl ran down swiftly, and unfastened a shallow punt that lay moored to them.

From above, the bell-man watched her untying the knotted rope. As she stepped into the boat and pushed off, the low moon came out from a bank of clouds, bright and golden, and showed

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him plainly it was Joyce Davenport. He knew her well, and the beautiful outline of her face with the waving silvery hair about it stood out plainly as a star in the dark.

The bell-man called in his worn and shaking voice that went echoing faintly over the water, but if she heard she did not heed.

Then a nameless dread of something wofully wrong became a certainty to him. Davenport was a fierce and dangerous man, fearing neither God nor the devil, and maids, even the gentlest, were not always easy of management. Even this one, who was sweet and gracious to all, even to him, the cross-grained old ringer of the bridge-bell, might have been tried beyond her strength and so, peradventure, would escape her father's ruling in her own way.

The thoughts flashed through his mind as he stood a moment in bewilderment.

Then, on a sudden, he ran along the water-way to where a small ferry made anchor for the night. Roughly rousing the sleepy ferry-man, he bid him put out, and told him why. Together they pulled the oars, following the little floating punt.

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The girl stood quite still and let the boat follow the tide—out it went, out and out, below the narrow, dangerous arches under the bridge; beyond where the river rippled on, broad and dark and quiet. The men saw her standing, tall and white. Then, with a little impulsive movement, she stepped to the edge of the small craft, and so into the river with her arms out and her face turned upward. The water eddied and rippled, eddied and rippled.

The ferry-man swore an oath under his breath, and the ferry shot forward with mighty strokes of his strong young arms, for he, too, had seen it was Joyce Davenport.

The old bell-man prayed aloud to his God.

Still no speck of white rose through the dark water. The ferry-man waited half a moment, scanning it breathlessly for some sign, then leapt over and dived.

When he rose, he had Joyce in his arms. The bell-man helped draw them in with his knotty, shaking hands.

"Be she dead, think you?" he asked hoarsely, as the other loosened his hold on his still burden



"SHE STEPPED TO THE EDGE OF THE SMALL CRAFT."

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and laid it on the bottom of the boat. "Be she dead, lad?"

"Marry, no, thou old fool!" he said, shaking the drops from his hair like a rough water-dog. "She hath not had time. Women do not die so easily; they be hard to kill. Gad!" leaning over, "'twere a pity to have aught so fair as this lass o' Davenport's rot i' the river till Judgment Day."

"Dost know her, then?" said the other.

"Aye, there is no river-man but knows her," he answered shortly. "Row away, old bell-ringer; we'd best have her home; the air grows chill."

"She be dead, I think," he repeated quaveringly; "I see no breath or stir of life about her. She be dead, master ferry-man, an' in her sins. The Lord forgives not those who take their own lives."

"Damn thee for a croaking raven!" said the ferry-man hotly; "row on an' hold thy tongue. 'Tis a swoon, come on belike afore she touched the river. Many a one drownth so; goes down an' comes up an' neither struggles nor fights for breath because they be not conscious. I'll gain-say she hath no water in her lungs, but is swooning."

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As he spoke, Joyce stirred and then lifted herself up. Her eyes were troubled and questioning as she looked from one face to the other, yet she did not speak.

"Thou mad young thing," muttered the old bell-man, patting her hand gently. "'Tis thou, Joyce, thou mad young thing. See, then, why didst do it, wench? Our days are in the Lord's hands. 'Tis not for us to cut them short. An' it had not been for *yon ferry-man*, thou wouldst ha' been at the bottom o' Thames by now."

"An' in heaven, good master bell-man," she answered faintly, smiling at him. "Dost not think so?"

"Nay, verily," he returned grimly; "more likely in perdition, with other souls that have forestalled the Lord's calling, an' slipped their troubles so."

She shuddered. "I know not. Perchance thou art right. I thought not of it so, nor did it trouble me. Perchance, indeed, thou art right. Yet, I would thou hadst let me go; it could not be worse than what will come here."

"Fret not for what will come. This be no way out o' it," he answered. "Art cold?"

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"Not so cold," she said, trembling a little, "as full o' fear. Take me not home, good bell-man, I pray thee. Take me not home."

"Why, then, home is the best place for wenches," he said. "The Lord will keep thee safe an' thou dost do right."

"Dost think so?" she said doubtfully.

"Aye," he said. "I know so, little maid. I know so for certain."

The ferry-man leaned over, wrung the water from her skirts, and wrapped his coat about her.

"We will soon be in," he said. "Marry, why didst give us such a start, Mistress Joyce? 'Tis no way for a lass to die. Hadst seen them drawn out o' the river the way I oft have, 'twould cure thee o' the fancy to go by way o' the water.

"There was one last week, now—she were thy age or thereabout—an' had dropped off Westminster Bridge three weeks past, all for some love-quarrel. We found her i' the marshes, an' they said she had been a comely wench. By Harry! an' thou couldst ha' seen her then! Her matted hair, sand-filled and rolled wi' sea-weed—aye, an' torn by the fishes. Her eyes——"

"Nay, nay!" Joyce cried faintly, throwing out

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her hands, "tell me not, master ferry-man; I would not *dream of it*. Peradventure, I have been wicked, and it may be sin to take one's life, yet I thought not of it so."

The ferry-man smiled. "I would not have thee try it again," he said eagerly. "'Twere rare beauty thrown away. Some man would break his heart or die unwed—mayhap, many o' them, for what thou canst tell."

"I doubt it, master ferry-man," she returned gently. "Methinks men are not made so."

The ferry brushed against the slippery stair, and the men helped her alight.

She went up a step or two, then turned and looked down at them. "I thank thee both," she said, "for thy kindness. I shall go straightway home."

"I will take thee, Mistress Joyce," answered the Puritan suspiciously; "thou art best watched there."

"Nay," said the girl, shaking her head, "I will do no more evil to-night, and would go alone. Say nothing, I pray you, of this hour to any."

The two men watched her as she rose slowly up the uneven stair, holding her clinging gown

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so she might not stumble. Then the ferry-man made fast his boat and went off, for there were yet two hours for sleep. But the gray old bell-man crept up the narrow way and stood watching till he saw Joyce pass Silas, sound asleep on his chair by the north gate, and so enter the toll-house.

Even then he waited anxiously, leaning by one of the parapets. "The mad young thing," he muttered softly to himself now and then, "to throw life away at its bloom.

"Dick Davenport is at the root o' this, the black heart! Marry, an' it had been *he* who dropped into the Thames, I would ha' let him bide—aye, let him bide an' sink to the bottom—the deeper the better. But she? Nay, verily, though in the river or out of it, she would be the Lord's, an' He would judge rightly, for o' *such* be the Kingdom of Heaven."

So he watched the tide and the toll-house till it was time for the ringing of the south bell, and dawn came up the river in a soft gray mist touched with gold.

JOYCE REFUSES TO OBEY

CHAPTER IV

IT was high noon when Davenport awoke from his sound sleep. The warm September sun, streaming through the prised glass, sprinkled the dim little room with flecks of colour, and fell full into the man's blue, black-lashed eyes, that were heavy and bloodshot from the night's carouse. His thick auburn hair, touched with silver at the temples, lay on his disordered collar in tangled waves, yet his face, which no dissipation reddened, was clear-cut as a cameo and of much the same creamy tint. The years had but added to his unusual physical beauty by broadening and knitting his figure more firmly, though perchance they had warped and discoloured his soul.

Some memory of the night came unpleasantly to him as he stretched and drew himself up on the wide bench where Silas had left him over night. With a muttered oath he thrust first one

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hand and then the other deep into the pockets of his doublet. Then he laughed—a short, mirthless laugh, that echoed through the toll-house and out on the river, an evil sound to hear.

“Not a sou!” he said, biting the words short. “Not a tinker’s groat! an’ I had ten rose-nobles an’ a double handful o’ silver bits at the last winning.” Then he gnawed at his silky moustache and bent his brows as he tried to follow some thought. “Who was’t turned the dice next? Now, who was’t? Aye, I mind me! Ferrier o’ the wine-shop. The trickster! Damme, if they were not loaded! The luck turned too much on a sudden.

“Gillian was there, too; devilish owl-eyed an’ devilish sober and sly, keeping all the small wit he has about him. Staking naught *himself*, but over-anxious to lend me more gold when mine failed.

“S’death! When such a fellow would lend you money, watch him, watch him; there’s method in his madness.

“’Twill cost Gillian somewhat to marry the maid. But he hath grasped the knowledge o’ *that*. He’s not my choice, neither. I would ha’

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wed her to a *gentleman*, for I like the breed best. Marry, these men o' the blue blood, how cold an' polished an' hard they be. Like steel. Steel that hath a keen edge on't. I would ha' wed her to one o' them, though not such as Yelverton, God wot. He hath no credit, even with the Jews." Then he smiled grimly. "Beshrew me! Davenport," he said, "thou dost forget thou art but a poor devil of a toll-taker. Who art thou to pick an' choose? Take the luck the gods send, an' give thanks. Gillian's as good as another, mayhap, an' 'tis well to have a rich fool ever at one's elbow. So!" reflectively, "he hath the Gardens, the play-tables, the dance-room, to say naught of a chain o' houses by Billingsgate, not one o' which the watch dare go nigh after nightfall. 'Twill serve, for a 'fool and his money be soon parted,' an' that's a true word, though I know not whether it be Solomon or young Will Shakespeare who spoke it."

Rising, the man straightened himself and strode to the narrow stairway.

"Art above there, Joyce?" he called.

"Yes, father," she answered, coming from her room. "I have been feeding the pigeons and did

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not know thou wert awake. Shall I get thee thy breakfast?"

"Nay, I care not for't. I have just roused. Thou canst lay me out fresh linen, an' my buff jerkin, an' nether hosen, for I shall take a dip i' the river; but first come thee here, lass; I would speak with thee."

Joyce came down the creaking stair slowly and entered the little living-room which the noon sun was brightening.

Davenport turned to her with impatience. "Why dost not hasten?" he said sharply. "Egad!" with a start, looking closely into her face, "what hath whitened thee so? Art ill? The plague is about the river-streets, an' two merchantmen from the East have it aboard an' are forbid the harbour."

"Nay," she answered with a little flickering smile, "nay, I am not ill, father. Have no fear o' me. But one cannot always command a colour. 'Tis a thing not greatly to be depended on. A sleepless night will blanch it, a sudden start, even a *heartache*—thou knowst it."

Davenport gave a shrug. "Thou art wrong there," he said cynically. "There be Court beau-

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ties who hold the secret o' keeping it better than that. Aye, an' wenches I myself have known—but that is neither here nor there. If naught ails thee, sweeting, but a heartache or a sleepless night, thy wild-rose bloom will come back soon enow. For me, I care not for too fast a red. Still, 'tis of another matter I would speak. Dost remember what I said to thee yesternight o' Gillian o' the Gardens? Well, 'tis not a subject that can be dismissed so shortly. Thou art full o' whims, as girls be ever, but listen; he loves thee, Joyce, full honestly and well, an' will make thee a right good husband." The man paused for a moment, then went on. "I would ha' thee wed an' settled. I weary o' the toll-house. One might as well be i' Newgate as tied to the north tower o' London Bridge. I must an' will ha' freedom for a space, full license o' liberty to come and go. But thou, sweet," he ended half-gently, "but thou—seest thou not no little wench could bide here alone?"

The girl gave a shiver as though the wind blew chill up the river from the sea. She raised her face to his with a certain appeal.

"My mother's people?" she said questioningly.

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"I know naught o' them, but could I not go to them perchance?"

He threw back his head and laughed heartily and as at an amusing memory.

"Thy mother's folk?" he answered at last, still smiling. "Now, didst not know, little one, I stole her away from them, if that can be called 'stolen' which comes fairly o' its own free will to a man? 'Twas no more harm than plucking a rose which leans over the fence too far i' the road an' so tempts those who walk the highway. Still, thy mother's people ha' hated me since then with a villainous an' undying hatred. Beshrew me if 'tis not the one keen living sensation any o' them ever experienced. They be grubbers o' the earth, void o' wit as the clods they turn. They drive cattle and shear sheep; rise with the first bird-call, an' drop to sleep when the fowl perch at even; yet, though they be heavy and dull as the cattle they tend, they have long memories, sweetheart, long memories. They be good livers—aye, sour-visaged, Puritan, good livers all o' them; but it would make their righteous hearts rejoice to see me swing o' Tyburn Hill."

Joyce gave a hopeless gesture. "Thou couldst

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not take me with thee, father?" she asked hesitatingly, "or—or—marry, yes, let me bide here with Silas?"

The man glanced at her with a certain softness.

"Odso! child," he said, "I have no settled plan, but would be free for once. I'll seek fortune a-field—but where could a man go with such as *thee* tied to him? Thou art not made for roughing it. As for Silas, well, 'tis beside the question. Furthermore, I have half-promised Gillian for thee. He is to be here by sundown, an' "—with a sudden change of tone—"an' the thing is good as settled. 'Tis a fair enow prospect, an' thou *must* marry him."

An answering gleam came into the girl's jewel-like eyes, so like his own.

"That I will na'," she said, lifting her head and looking at him straightly, while the colour came flying into her cheeks. "That I will na', neither now nor at any time."

Davenport caught her by the wrist and thrust his passionate, dangerous face close to hers.

"Dost dare me?" he whispered with suppressed fury. "Dost think I am a man to be defied *always*? Hark thee! I have dealt with women

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ere this and know the way o' it. There be not one in ten thousand worth a flip o' the finger and thumb till her spirit be broken. Now, my beauty, I will break *thine* an' thou art obstinate! Afterward, egad! there will be less trouble with thee. Yet, listen. Because I have the *patience o' the canonised saints*, I ask thee *once again*. Wilt thou wed Gillian or no?"

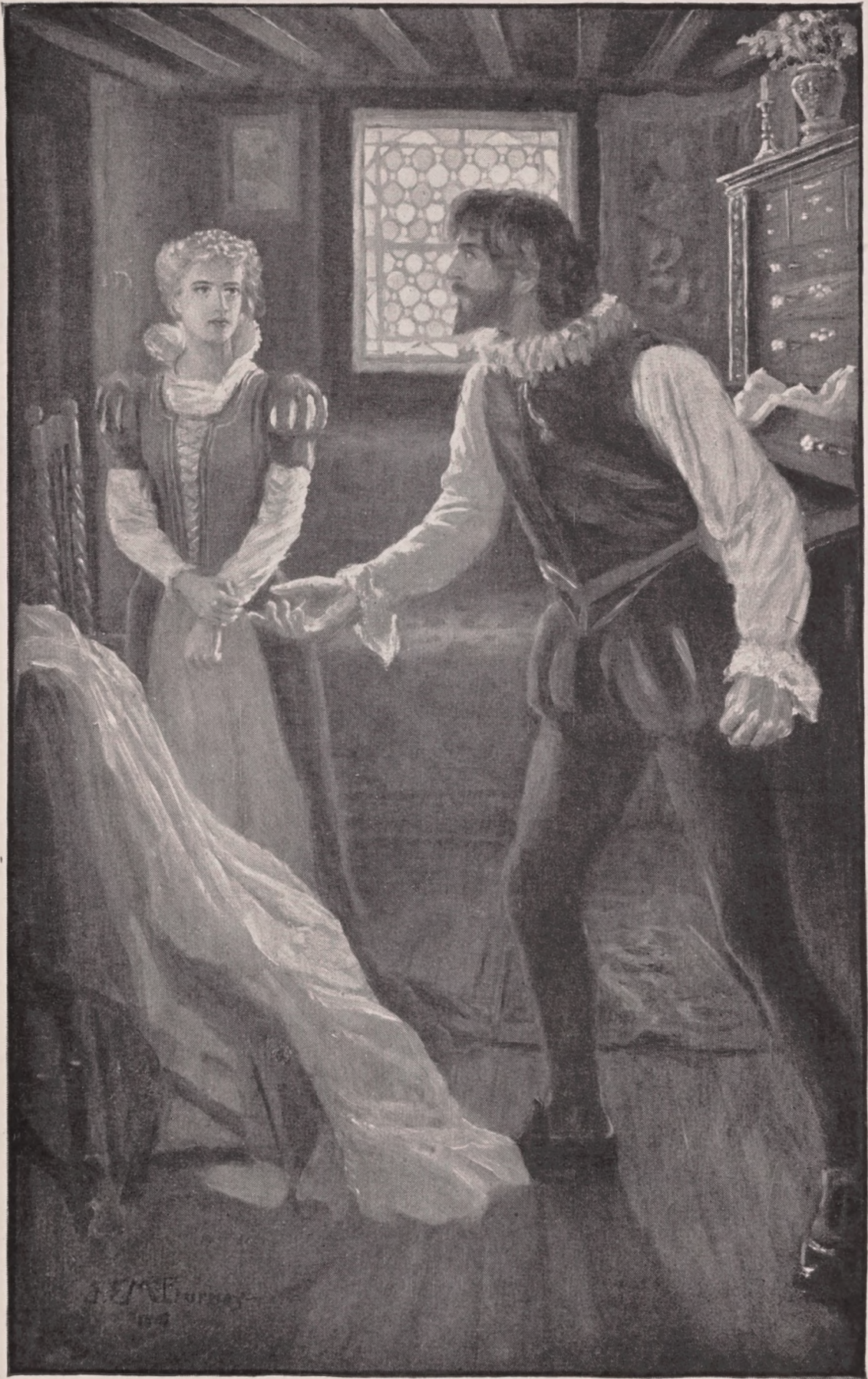
A mist rose to the girl's eyes and a trembling came to her lips, but her voice was steady.

"Nay," she said, "I will na'."

"So," he answered shortly, dropping her arm and striding over to the Spanish sea-chest.

Unhooking a key deliberately from where it hung against the wall, he fitted it into the lock and let down the carven door, behind which were a tier of drawers. One of these he pulled out by its curious glass handles, and from it floated a strange spicy perfume. It was piled high with silken stuffs. Among them he found a folded garment, which he shook out.

It was a gown of glistening cream-hued silk, banded here and there with narrow gold embroidery of a foreign pattern. About the neck, cut square and low, and at the wrists of the long



"HERE BE THY WEDDING-GOWN."

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puffed and slashed sleeves, was much ruffling of ivory-tinted lace.

"Here be thy wedding-gown," he said between his teeth, tossing it over a chair-back. "The sea-chest was wreckage the year thou wast born, put up to raffle and knocked down to *me*—therefore, come by *honestly*. Nathless," with a sneer, "unless thou wert told so, thy scruples of conscience would prevent thee taking pleasure in wearing such finery. Thou hast some Puritan in thee. But thou wilt don this frock, Mistress Joyce, and these also," turning to the chest again and taking out a pair of small yellow slippers with high red heels, "against *thy wedding*, which will take place by the bell o' St. Paul's at six o' the evening. When I have changed my linen, I will see Gillian to acquaint him with his good luck, after which we will find a priest and return here. Therefore, see thou be ready."

Joyce shook her head a little, but answered nothing.

"Therefore, see thou be ready," he said again with a tremble in his voice as of some violence held in leash.

"I would please thee an' I could," she replied,

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looking away out of the small window to where the Thames glittered in the warm sun and the boats went busily back and forth, "but i' this it is not possible."

He wheeled toward her with swift fury. The blood had risen to his forehead and settled there in a red band; his breath came short and fast.

"Look thee!" he said in a sharp, quick voice that cut the air like a lash, "an' thou wilt not *willingly* consent when the priest be here, an' thou dost *defy* me before him, then will we take thee, UNWED, to Gillian's house i' the bear-gardens, an'—*i' the morning* thou wilt be full ready to have the man o' God return!"

So saying, he wheeled about and went out, shutting the door behind him with such violence the little house rocked.

Joyce Davenport stood very still where her father had left her. Her eyes were wide and burned like stars; the marks of his strong fingers stood out in red and angry colour on her arm. She covered the place with her other hand.

The room was again dim and shadowy, for it only caught the sun at high noon. The girl looked slowly about it as though seeking for some

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plan of escape. No definite thought came to her. She was as though lost in a maze, and so stood still.

The dreadful threat Davenport had spoken hardly reached her yet in its full force, but the one idea that presently became all-absorbing was that he would certainly come back—later on—and with Gillian. She crossed to the low window where the brown figure of the juggler had so often stood of late, and leaned her face for a moment against the weather-stained frame of wood, closing her eyes, but only for a moment. Then she went to the chair upon which lay the cream-hued silken gown. This she gathered in her arm, and with it the high-heeled slippers.

“Now,” she said half-aloud, “what is’t I must do first? Something, I know there was. Aye, I remember. First I will lay out the buff clothes and fresh linen for my father.”

Going above-stairs, she took the undershirt and wide starched collar from its box and laid beside it a holiday tabard of deep yellow cloth, slashed here and there with wine-coloured cordovan; there were low pointed boots of the same and a rolling hat with a plume and buckle.

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It was such a suit as one of the players from the Southwark theatres might have worn, and was costly and beautiful, but it matched Davenport's tastes, for there were many gentlemen about London who did not dress so extravagantly as the toll-taker.

After these garments were brushed of the last bit of dust and folded in full sight on the low bed, with nothing missing, from the collar-scarf to the garters of the long, rough silk nether stocks, she went to her own room.

"Now will I dress, as he bade me," she said, conceding as a woman will in trifles; "'tis full as easy to think in a silken gown as a russet one, an' till I think I know not what to do."

Shortly, Davenport came up the stairs, and she heard him moving about with nervous haste in his bedroom, speaking now and then to himself in broken sentences, as was his habit when excited. After a little he stepped out on the landing.

"Art there, Mistress Joyce?" he called sharply.

"Aye, father; dost want me?"

"Art dressed?" he said, by way of reply.

For answer she threw open the door, and he

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

saw her standing in front of the copper mirror, a vision of loveliness that the light centred upon.

Her peculiar silvery blond hair was waved and coiled high on her head, and caught there with a golden dart that long ago he had given her; about her forehead and ears there rippled little stray lovelocks.

The square-cut bodice showed the dazzling white of her throat and shoulders, and the straight long folds of the silken gown clung about her young, rounded limbs.

He raised his hand to his eyes as he had done the morning he first discovered her great beauty.

"Thou wilt do," he said. "'Tis well thou hast come to thy senses."

"Nay," she replied, "think not so. I have not changed in mind, yet am I sore bewildered, an' know not what is best to do."

"Thou wilt do as I bid thee," he returned grimly, and went down the stairs.

Going out, he double-locked the door and across it hung a chain that was but seldom used.

"Now, by the Saints of God!" he said to himself softly as he strode down the bridge, as goodly

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

a figure as any abroad in the afternoon sun, "now by the last bit o' my honour, 'tis a thing I hate to do! She hath my spirit, an' a rarer beauty than any I ha' seen. Gillian o' the bear-gardens or Ferrier! 'Tis enow to give a man a humour o' the brain to think on't. 'Tis casting a pearl before swine."

Joyce sat down wearily on a low stool that had been hers when she was a child, and stooping, lifted the little tangled-haired dog that always followed her about, and gathered him against the laces of her dress. He curled down in much content and shut his golden-brown eyes that, awake, held the unspoken melancholy of the ages in their depths.

"I would I were like thee," she said, stroking him softly, "an' could so easily forget. Sleep is not for me—I must plan—must think me some way quickly out o' these troubles.

"Poor Silas! he hath been long on watch. If he could help me now he would—i' faith, to the last drop o' his blood, so he hath sworn often. But 'tis myself must help myself. No one else may now—no, not even the great Queen."

She stopped with a sharp catching of the breath.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"*The Queen!*" she said again. A flashing thought had come to her.

Rising, Joyce dropped the little sleeping dog onto the floor, where he awoke with a frightened bark. She ran over to where a tiny box lay on the table, lifted it, pressed on a spring, and the cover opened. Inside was a ring, which she took up and slipped on her thumb. It was a thick golden band set with a strange red-veined green stone, upon which was carven the letter "E."

Without waiting, the girl caught her cloak from its peg, tied it on, threw her skirts over her arm, and flew down the dark stairs, the high-heeled slippers tapping the floor at each quick step. Finding the door fast, she opened the window and called Silas.

The old sailor came pegging along from his seat.

"Pray thee make haste, good Silas!" Joyce called softly. "I have somewhat to tell thee that only *thou* must hear. But first—art not fore-wearied?"

"Belike I be, Mistress Joyce," he replied, coming up. "Aye, stiff i' my timbers I be, an' weary to the marrow. Thy father hath not been on

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

duty since yestere'en, yet I saw him swing down Southwark way but half an hour gone, dressed like the Queen's trumpeter for grandness! He might ha' been off to a wedding-feast."

Joyce caught her breath.

"Marry, thou hast had a long watch," she said sympathetically. "Perchance thou didst not sleep i' the night, neither? Hast had thy dinner?"

"Well, as to that," he said, rubbing his jaw, divided between his desire for more pity and the truth, "well, as to that, a man cannot get many winks o' sleep sitting bolt upright through the dark; an' the sea-wind blows in sharp toward daybreak—but I had a collap for my dinner; naught to speak of, but just a cold collap an' a pint o' sack from Ferrier's."

"Now, that is better!" she said. "I feared thou wert hungry. But listen," leaning toward him; "I have news for thee. Mayhap as thou hast been a little fond o' me, thou wilt not care to hear it.

"I be going away, Silas, quite away. An' I will tarry. I will not come back to the toll-house, neither to-day nor to-morrow—nor *any* to-morrow."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

The old sailor stared dumbly at her.

"Look not so at me, good Silas," she said, "nor make it harder. I have my wits and know what I do. I go because 'tis best, because I must; yet will I not tell thee *where*, even if it chance that I know, for then thou wilt have naught to conceal from my father when he questions thee."

"But why?" he said, finding words, and with his old face lined and troubled. "What's to do, mistress? There will sure be some reason for such madness."

"Indeed, yes," she answered, "reason enough. I have been sorely unhappy. Oh, vastly more unhappy than thou canst dream, thou who art content to sit i' thy corner by the tower day in an' out, an' dost only fret if the wind blows too chill for thee, or the rain falls too heavy, or the sun shines too hot! Perchance thou hast outlived many things. But seest thou not life comes in different sort to me? I may find patience when I be old, but age is far off. I will tell thee what befell," she went on, speaking rapidly. "Last night I stood by my window long past the hour my father came home. It seemed I never would sleep again. Many things that thou

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

dost not wot of, Silas, have lately gone awry. The river ran dark and smooth, save where it rippled, flecked with silver i' the moon, and the moon itself, like a ball o' gold, may have cast its spell on me—I know not—but this I did. I went out an' away down the old water-stairs—those that be green and slippery from the tide and that rock when one steps hard on them—an' I took the little punt that is ever moored there and pushed it out. When it drifted past the starlings o' the bridge, I stepped out an' into the river."

The old man swore and caught her hand.

"Aye," she answered. "'Tis very truth, an' I but tell thee lest it become gossip, and so doth reach thee i' some other way. 'Twas the old bell-man who followed, while he an' a ferry-man brought me safe out, nor would not let me die."

"The bell-ringer!" cried Silas. "The dour, lemon-faced Puritan, whose head be cracked worse than the bell o' south tower he rings! I would ha' thought he'd let thee drown. He doth hate womankind."

"I' faith, no, good Silas," she returned gently. "Meseemeth the world misunderstands some men."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

'Twas the old Puritan—half-mad though he be—
—who made me see what I did was evil, yet he
was not harsh."

Silas still gazed at her blankly.

"I' the river?" he muttered. "I' the river,
sweeting? Aye, but thou must ha' had a heart-
ache first."

She gave a little upward smile at him. "Well,
marry, I may have had, but in any case I will
not try to stop it so again."

"I trow not," he answered. "'Tis a mad way,
an' a wicked."

"Thou dost know my father an' I be not al-
ways o' the same mind," she went on. "Per-
chance it is because we cannot agree that I go
away. He says a woman's whole duty is obedi-
ence—he doth not grant her a will o' her own.
He tells me her spirit—an' so be she unhappily
have one—must be *broken* ere she be worth,"
remembering his words, "*a flip o' the finger and
thumb.*"

"An' I warrant, mistress," he chimed in, "he
hath broken the spirits an' hearts—for 'tis much
the same thing—o' more women than any other
Englishman before him, save," reflectively, "may-

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

hap, King Harry himself. There was a pretty wench now, of a sort best not mentioned before thee, who yet loved thy father, an' i' a fray i' one of the river-houses, where knives were out, she threw herself before him an' caught a blow meant to end his life. An' there was yet another—" The girl shuddered.

"Nay, nay, Master Silas, I would hear no more. Time flies, an' 'tis the four-o'clock ferry upstream I would catch. Wilt help me step out by the window? These skirts leave me no freedom."

"Nay," he said. "'Tis ill asking me to help thee with thy wild schemes."

"Prythee *trust* me," she answered coaxingly. "Worse befalls if I stay than if I go."

He waited, thinking heavily.

"Then give me thy hand," he said presently, and lifted her out as best he could.

The girl stood for a moment beside him, looking into his sea-worn old face.

"I' truth, I hate to leave thee mightily, good Silas," she said, her eyes swimming with tears. "Thou wert ever my best friend, an' we have seen sights together an' gone a-Maying, thou and

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

I. Dost remember how we used to sail i' the red dingy, an' how thou didst sing me sea-ballads an' tell me o' thy fortunes? Yes, an' hast forgotten that summer day, years ago, when the Queen's company, lords and ladies all—like folk from fairy-land—rode over the bridge, an' how Her Majesty stopped her white palfrey at north tower an' asked for my father?"

"That do I well," he said. "Marry, naught would do but her Grace an' the whole glittering lot o' 'em must have out the toll-taker to see him! An' alack-a-day! he was abroad, cock-fighting i' Southwark. So then I bethought me on a sudden o' *thee*, an' fetched thee from the house just as thou wert i' thy little blue frock an' thy wondrous cloud o' silver locks about thee, an' I lifted thee up to the Queen's saddle so thou might kiss her hand, while all the Court people drew around, chattering like magpies o' thy beauty."

Joyce gave a little laugh, though the mist still dimmed her eyes.

"An' dost not further remember, dear Silas, how, peradventure, because she liked my face, the great Queen slipped this green-stoned ring

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

on my finger, an' bid me show it at the palace-gate should ever day come when I would see her, an' said it held a stone of magic one might dream on?"

"Gadzooks, yes, Mistress Joyce!" he exclaimed, "'tis the very ring! I do mind me well. Now God save Queen Bess!" he said, taking off his cap.

"But is't to Westminster Palace thou dost fare?" he said aghast. "Nay, dream not o' anything so wild. Trust nothing to the Queen's grace. Her Majesty be full o' caprice and with a mind beset o' many things. She will ha' clean forgotten the summer day she rode o'er the bridge, an' the fairy ring she gave thee, an' even *thee* also, sweeting."

"I say not where I fare, Master Silas," the girl answered sadly, bending down to lift the little dog which had leaped from the window and was now at her feet. "I say not where I fare, so wilt thou have the less to tell. But I would hasten, for there be scant time to reach the ferry."

Catching his knotty hand in her two soft ones, she raised it to her lips, then pulled her hood

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well over her hair, gathered her skirts together, and ran swiftly past the gates.

Silas looked after her, then down at his hand. Kisses were not things that often came his way, and he felt the touch of the warm lips yet. His clogged brain, heavy from want of sleep, revolved tediously about one thought, and the superstition that he shared with other sailors rose in its might.

"Now by the Mass!" he whispered hotly, "'tis the juggler who hath wound this coil. Belike the devil helps him throw the long knives, for he hath a reckless, fearless way no unaided man e'er knew. And," crossing himself hurriedly, "nathless, he hath the *evil eye*. 'Twas so he made me, who am un beholden to him i' any matter, feel his mastery. 'Do this or that,' he says, his head high an' his eyes blazing on one, an' straightway a man does it, whate'er it be.

"Odso! no little wench could withstand such witchery, an' he hath straightly caught Mistress Joyce i' some spell or love-trap; but," smiling grimly, "she hath a will o' steel, an' hath broken away, so it's not old Silas will help any overtake her. Should the brown trickster come about north tower to-night, I'll ha' a tale for him will

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

free his eyes o' sleep, an' give him a bed o' thorns for many a week.

"'Tis like he would ha' played fast and loose with the wench an' forgotten her when the fever was past, but *now* doth he love her i' his own mad, evil way, or ne'er saw I the signs. He would dice his soul to the devil for her to-day, though he whistled her down the wind to-morrow. Marry, such a man loves longest that which he be *denied*, an' mayhap what is but a memory may torture him. 'Twill catch him sharper than a stiletto at his heart. It be ill trying to hurt those o' the charmed lives—but my news will serve. I like not the ancient serving-man neither. Honest men move not so catlike afoot."

So he communed with himself while a tide of anger beat the blood into his troubled face and set his crippled fingers trembling as he reached up for the riders' tolls. Yet he kept close to his post and waited, with the patience of the old and sad, for what might happen next.

When five o'clock rang, a young, square-set man came up the footpath and stopped by Silas. He was dressed in the oil-skin jerkin and long

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boots of a waterman, and wore a woollen cap of scarlet.

"Is't thou, Giles Bowman?" asked the old sailor.

"Aye," he answered shortly. "Be Mistress Davenport within?"

"What wouldst wi' her?" said Silas suspiciously. "What wouldst wi' her, lad?"

"I would see her," he answered, flushing beneath his brown. "Prythee, I would see if she be well an' safe. I feared—I know scarce what—but since yesternight——"

"I' faith," cried Silas softly, breaking in, "marry an' Amen! Then it be *thou*, Giles o' the ferry, who with the daft bell-man followed Mistress Joyce i' the river!"

"Aye," he answered. "But who made *thee* free o' the story? 'Twas not the bell-ringer, eh? I would not have scandal."

Silas shook his head. "The maid told me herself. But," lowering his voice hoarsely, "there be a mystery about it all, an' she hath now gone away. To the gray sisters, methinks, but be not sure."

The ferry-man started. "By Heaven!" he

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

said sharply, "these be strange doings. For what reason, master, did she go? For what reason, now? I have no liking for mysteries."

"'Tis no business o' *thine*," said Silas, glancing at the strong young face. "Yet I'll trust thee as thou dost know part. Dost bring to mind the brown juggler who lately tossed knives at bridge-foot?"

"Aye——"

"'Tis by reason o' *him* she hath fled, I'll gainsay. He put a spell over her. He hath a charm o' way with him, an' the evil eye, but my mistress hath broken from the snare o' such love as he would give. She hath escaped. The toll-man knows naught an' has said naught," the old sailor continued. "If he cannot take care o' what belongs to him, marry, let him lose it, say I. I will tell him nothing, neither do *thou*, o' last night's work."

"But the juggler! That is another matter. Beshrew me! He shall ha' his game blocked. He would rake London over, aye, would scour the high seas, but he would find Mistress Joyce. He is not one to let his quarry escape, nor is he easily thwarted when he hath gone mad about a

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maid. He is dangerous, or I be no judge o' men, an' hath a slippery tool ever at his heels i' the shape o' an old serving-man—wedge-faced, an' wiry, an' hard to corner, I warrant, as any weasel.

“Now pay fast heed, master ferry-man. When the juggler com'th to-night, finds the cage empty and the bird flown, he will ply me desperately with questions. Then, mark you, will I tell him o' the *river*, o' how the little lass took the punt an' drifted out an' threw herself in by cause o' heartbreak. Then, God's mercy, will I ship him to *thee* as one who saw it. If thou dost help me by saying *naught o' the rescue*, he will think her at the bottom o' Thames, an' leave hunting her for other game. Dost follow me? 'Tis a trick, but one the priest would shrive a man for.”

The man reddened darkly. “Hath this fellow played Joyce Davenport false, think you?” he said.

“That I know not,” answered Silas, “but she hath been mightily troubled an' over-set. Wilt do as I ask? Tell him only that thou from thy ferry saw Mistress Joyce throw herself i' the river?”

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"That will I," he answered. "I will not aid the trickster. Nay," with a quick gleam in his eyes, "I would *kill* him an' I thought—but I will not wrong her by thinking. Which way went she, good man? I would follow an' see she be safe."

There was a tremble in the quick speech and a hot eagerness. Silas shot a glance at him. "*Thou, too?*" he said. "Nay, master ferry-man, give o'er dreaming o' Joyce Davenport. Who-e'er she be for, she be not for *thee*. Me seemeth no man may see her on London Bridge more. I have a forecasting o' it. Keep to thy promise. So canst thou help her best."

The ferry-man turned away and had gone a distance when Silas called after him:

"Send the bell-man by an' thou dost happen on him."

"Aye," he answered, and went on.

It neared six as the bell-man came silently as a shadow around the angle of the tower.

Silas was watching, yet started at the sudden sight of the lean figure and sharp, leathery face.

"I would speak with thee, master bell-ringer," he said.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Speak on," he returned. "As for me, I answer no man unless the spirit bids me, for silence is better than words."

"In a woman, yes," said the sailor. "As for thee, 'tis known on the bridge that when thou dost speak, 'tis the truth."

"There be little virtue in that," he answered. "I be no son o' the father o' lies."

"Beshrew me, the truth is well, master bellman, an' many a good gentleman would ha' been saved racking i' the Tower had he spoken it first instead o' last. But, 'tis beside the question. The truth is vastly better than lies, yet it doth not follow that a man must tell *all* the truth. One needs discretion. It be surely no sin to keep back that to his own conscience which will but harm another i' deadly fashion should it be spit forth."

"Thou art long o' wind," answered the bellman, sighing. "What hath this to do wi' me? My conversation is ever 'Yea, yea,' 'Nay, nay,' as the Lord directed. I harm no man, but ring the south-tower bell when the tides be high. Let me be gone."

"Not till thou dost give me a fair promise,"

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answered Silas firmly, holding him by the ragged sleeve of his leather jerkin.

"That is as God directs," he said.

"Dost mind thee, last night i' the moonlight, seeing the toll-man's little wench throw herself i' the river?" said Silas close to his ear.

"That do I," he replied. "I followed an' woke the ferry-man, an' he followed likewise."

"Now God be praised!" said Silas. "But hearken! Should one come to ask thee o' it, say just this much: '*I saw the maid slip i' the water,*' an' say no more. 'Tis an *evil* man will ask thee, one who hath caused her unhappiness, who would bring her more. I would have him think her sea-drift by this time, so will he betake himself elsewhere an' give o'er troubling my mistress. Does sense o' this reach thy brain?"

The leathery face, looking steadily at Silas, was twisted and perplexed. "Now there be no verse o' Scripture to lead one here," he muttered.

"By the Saints!" cried Silas hotly, "the little wench would ha' been at peace by to-day an' 't had not been for *thy* meddling. Would set this man on to cause her more grief? He be a pirate

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

o' women's hearts, a freebooter. Marry, thou art over-righteous an' full o' piety!"

"Not so, my friend," said the bell-man; "no man is over-righteous. Mistress Joyce is a gentle wench, though such beauty as she hath is but the devil's snare to catch men. Still, I would na' harm her. I will say but half-truth, master toll-man, should this man ask me aught."

"I thank thee," answered Silas with a breath of relief. "Thou hast a good heart."

"Nay," he returned, "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. To this one man—should I know him—I will speak but half-truth, and to others I will say naught."

"Nathless, thou *wilt* know him," returned Silas. "He is mightily tall an' powerful, an' hath a handsome brown face with strange eyes that put a spell on one. So. To thy cracked bell, maister Puritan, an' I to my tolls. Yonder is the toll-master coming with Gillian o' the Gardens an' a priest for company. Now what can the man o' God wi' them? 'Tis a dove an' two carrion crows. Egad! there will be trouble afore the night's past. Get thee to thy bell, good ringer, the river rises."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Davenport came up with his long, swinging step, the priest, heavy and short of wind, keeping up to him as best he could. Gillian walked a little behind, and wore a suit of Kendal green much laced with crimson ribbons, from which dangled and jingled long gilt needle-tags.

From his corner Silas watched them cunningly, his eyes blinking from the strong sun, which was turning the Thames to a river of gold in the west.

The toll-master took down the chain from his door as the great bell of St. Paul's rang six times.

"We be on the stroke o' the hour, Father," he said, glancing at the priest and Gillian, and turning the key at the moment.

"I left the wench word we would return at six. So, come thee both in. Come thee both in."

They entered the room, over which lay a strange silence.

Davenport went to the stairfoot.

"I will above and fetch the maid, Gillian," he said. "A little shyness be pardonable, an' rare nowadays. Marry, she may fly thee a bit. Wait, good Father, i' yonder chair an' get thy breath."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

They listened to him mounting the steep stairs, opening the doors on either side of the landing and striding across the sanded floors. Once or twice they heard him break forth with an oath, short and terrible. Then there was silence and he came down again.

He stood there, straight as an arrow, his head a little thrown back, looking from one to the other. There was a red glow in the depths of his eyes like that in the heart of a fire, and his face was a white, frozen mask. His square lower jaw set hard to the other, and a strand of his long moustache was caught between his teeth.

"My daughter be not within," he said. "I will to the sailor at the gate; he must know which road she hath taken. By the Lord Harry, she will not have dared go far!"

Out of the door he wheeled again, Gillian watching, with his small, shifty eyes growing narrower and more eager every moment, and his blunt fingers hooking and unhooking and snapping at the joints with a dull sound.

The priest waited in phlegmatic silence. Marriages were naught to him save as to the fee, and for this one he had been paid beforehand,

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

as it was a fast-day, and therefore he demurred at coming at all.

"What's to do, Silas?" they heard Davenport call. "Where be thy mistress?"

"Be she not within?" he answered heavily.

"That she is not. Come, wake thyself. Hast seen her?"

"Not o' late, maister," he said. "Not o' late, truly. What be thy hurry?"

Davenport clinched his hands and took a swift step, then held up.

"Sharpen thy wits, blockhead," he said with dangerous softness, "or I will put an edge on them for thee! Get thee off thy stool an' come hither. Now. Where be my daughter?"

Silas rubbed his chin.

"I know not," he answered. "Thou dost not set me here to watch thy daughter, master toll-man, but to take the tolls. I should ask more wage an' thou didst."

Davenport shut his teeth savagely.

"Thou idiot!" he said. "Damme if I do not break thy neck an' thou dost not answer!"

The old sailor smiled a little and shook his head.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"I fear thee not, maister," he said. "I be heavy wi' sleep, an' may ha' nodded off betimes. It seemeth I saw Mistress Joyce run by north tower a while ago with the little rough dog i' her arms. At four or five o' the bell, bechance. How should I know whither she sped, or if by thy license?"

Davenport laughed beneath his breath.

"Lord, I hate a fool!" he said, stopping short. "Didst not gape at me whilst I made fast the chain? Dost not *know* how I guard the jade? Thou dolt!"

"I mind naught but my business, which be taking thy tolls," said Silas stubbornly, "an' I be fore-wearied, maister."

"Thou wilt be more," he said furiously. "I will deal with thee later."

Then he turned to the others.

"Get to thy beads, good Father," he said, "an' beseech Heaven grant me patience when I overtake the lass, for find her I will—without thy prayers or our Lady's help."

"Thou art blasphemous, my son," returned the priest mildly. "Anger like thine leads to mortal sin."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Davenport smiled. "S'death!" he said. "I call not *this* anger. Anger breeds i' my soul but slowly. Perchance by midnight 'twill have reached white heat an' my luck hath not turned. So! To thy rosary. Thou wilt earn thy fee later.

"As for thee, Gillian," looking toward him, "dost care to search wi' me, or art content to cry the match off? 'Tis one to me. There be a score o' men—men o' blood an' money—I can fill thy place wi' as bridegroom on the morrow."

"Go to, Davenport!" cried the bear-keeper. "Hold thy temper. Not so fast. I like a coquette, an' I'll ha' that lass o' thine if I spend my last groat for't. I withdraw only should I find some other gentleman hath forestalled me an' taken right o' way with Mistress Joyce."

The toll-master glanced him over from head to foot and shrugged his shoulders.

"Most men would ha' small blame for her if such were the case. But—I know her better. She might try to escape thee, but not by such means. Unless—" he paused, a thought striking him.

"Hark thee, thou old fool!" he called sharply

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

to Silas. "Hath seen the masked juggler hereabouts since yestere'en?"

"That have I not, maister," he answered positively. "Neither he nor his serving-man have passed the gate. This I can stake my soul on."

"Then we will to the ladies o' St. Anne's or St. Margaret's," said Davenport. "'Tis there Joyce hath flown—there be no other place—save 'tis to an old nurse she once had who lives near the marshes. An' I find that bedlam dame hath given her shelter, I will have her to the ducking-pond for a witch!"

He led off at a rapid pace, Gillian following, while the priest made his way back to the Dominican friary, now so deserted of his kind.

But Silas waited.

The evening drew in, and the early watch ambled by as was their habit, no two together. By-and-by, when the riders were few, he pegged over to Jock Ferrier's and asked for a drink. He drained the great horn flagon while he stood at the wine-shop door, and kept his eye on the gate. Then he returned to his post.

"By our Lady!" he said once or twice with lips that were still dry, "he shall not escape!"

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Keep thy wits where thou canst find them, Silas! Thou wilt need them to-night."

Eight struck, and the links were set alight on the towers. A little salt breeze, sharp and fresh, sent the river pulsing quickly around the piers and bulwarks of the bridge. The footpath was deserted, save at long intervals, and the highway of the Thames was almost empty of pleasure-craft, though a few wherries and punts plied steadily between the landings. Here and there the stars winked out, and a comet, strangely luminous, that had of late distracted the astrologers by its vagaries, hung above the distant Tower. Silas crossed himself as he saw it. The old sailor was giddy from want of sleep and faint, yet he strained his eyes through the dusk.

Nine tolled out from St. Paul's again, solemnly and slow, and was followed by the lesser bells. An owl flew overhead with muffled wings, and hooted softly. Then down the bridge came the man Silas waited for. There was no mistaking that lithe and graceful figure. Yet it was not the juggler of bridge-foot as people knew him. To-night he wore no suit of sad-hued cordovan,

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

nor was he masked. He was dressed in gray cloth, shot with silver threads that sparkled as he moved. A little fur-edged cloak hung from his shoulders, and his wide black hat was plumed and buckled. When he reached the toll-house he stopped, looking up at the windows, then passed it and returned, this time knocking sharply at the door. The sound echoed out over the water and died away. The man turned about and crossed to the corner where Silas sat in the velvet-black shadow.

"Art alone, Master Silas," he said, "or is the toll-master about? I would speak with him."

"I be alone," answered the sailor slowly.

"Where is thy master?"

"That I know not," he returned, "but he seeks what he would find, an' is abroad i' the night."

The tall, questioning figure drew a step nearer and looked down into the old, determined face.

"Come into the light of the links," he said; "I would read thee. I like not thy tone of voice, nor words that are riddles. What hath the toll-master lost of value? Speak quickly."

Silas rose stiffly.

"I speak as I know," he replied. "Davenport

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

hath lost his daughter and seeks her, though, peradventure, he will not find her."

The man laid his two strong hands on the bent shoulders.

"Art sane or hast been drinking?" he said between his teeth. "Play not with me, I am in no mood for jollity. Now, where is thy mistress, Joyce Davenport?"

The words came with swiftness that betokened danger, and the hands that gripped Silas were as of steel within velvet, yet his lined face looked up unafraid.

"Ask the river yonder," he said softly. "Ask the river, sir juggler. See if 'twill answer; for me, I jest not."

"The Thames?" said the man. "The *Thames*? What hath that to do with the question? Thou art stark mad! I am a fool to pay heed to thee."

He took a step away, then stopped.

"Egad! Why shouldst thou tell such a tale?" he went on. "Even a madman hath method. There must be somewhat behind. Damn thee! dost not see I suffer? Thy little mistress—truly she is not within—nor yet is the toll-man about—but why invent a *lie* to cover their absence?"

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

'Fore Heaven, tell me the truth! Where are they?"

"Listen, then," Silas answered, creeping toward him. "Last night Mistress Joyce took the river way o' ending grief—'tis a common one hereabout. Aye, there be always bodies i' the dead-houses along the banks. They drift up mostly, though some go to sea. I say not what misfortune came to my lady. Marry, I know not what traps such men as *thee* set for a maid, but thou hast a strange charm an' are good to the eye. Thou art o' the quality, too, though thou dost play to the people an' take their small coin. Thou art o' the quality, an' meant not to wed the lass. See you," sinking his voice, "there is ever a little punt moored at the old water-stair. This she took i' the hour near dawn an' drifted out, an' stepped from it i' the Thames."

A quick shudder ran through the juggler.

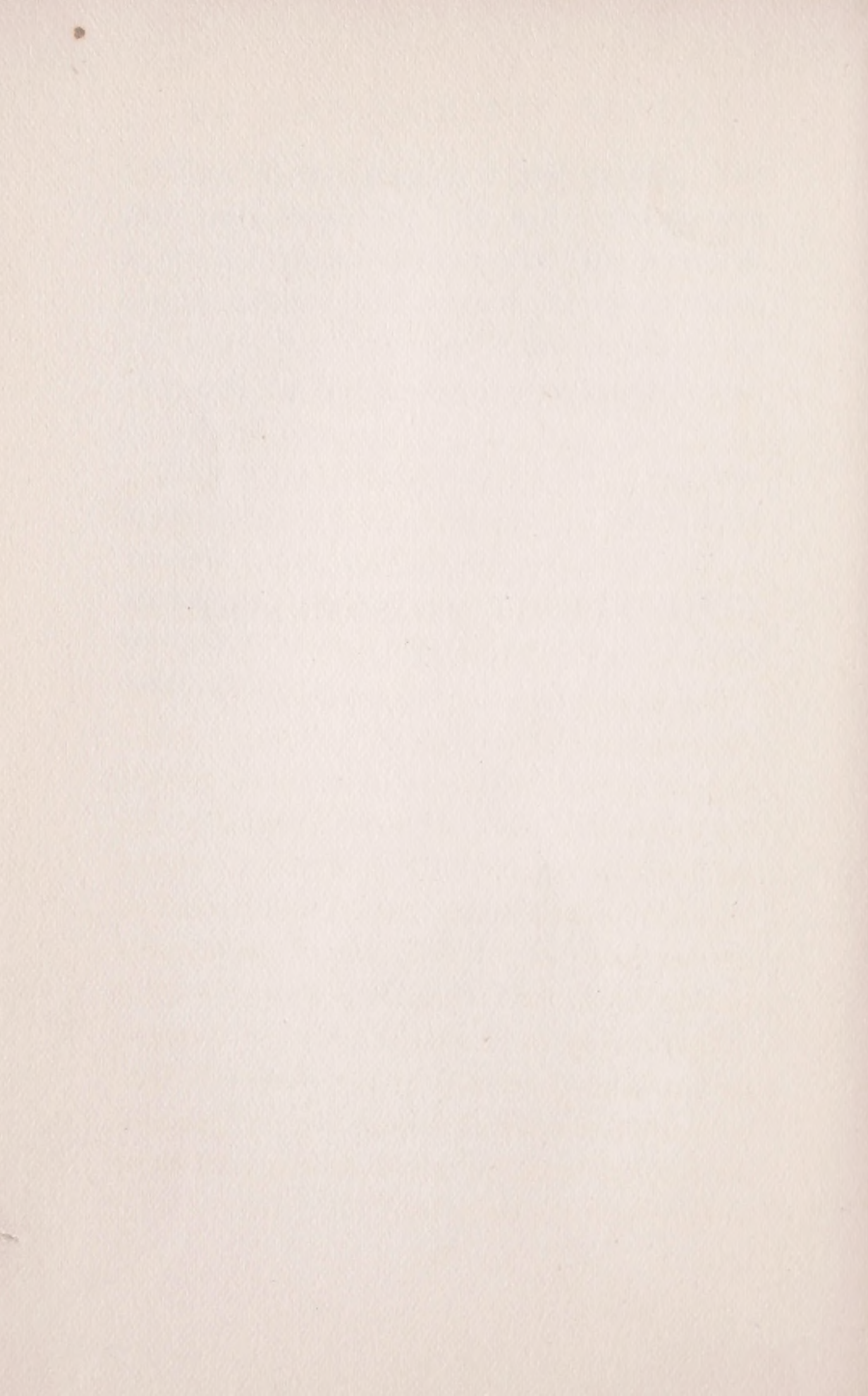
"Now this be *truth*," he whispered slowly, bending near Silas in the dark. "Thou art convincing. There is the essence of death in thy voice, and the chill of it; but I must know past doubt. I will have *proof*. Didst *see* this horror *thyself*?"

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

“Nay, maister juggler, I saw naught. The little maid slipped by i’ the dark. But go thee to the *bell-ringer* o’ south tower. He is betwixt this an’ bridge-end all hours o’ the day an’ night. *He saw!* An’ find, then, *Giles Bowman*, the ferry-man by the landing nearest north tower; *he* will tell thee.”

Yelverton walked back to the old leaning toll-house and stood for a moment by the latticed window. His uplifted face, as Silas saw it, showed hard as though cut from flint. Then he went toward Southwark rapidly with long, unsteady steps.

THE FLIGHT TO SOMERSET
HOUSE



CHAPTER V

JOYCE DAVENPORT reached the upstream ferry as it was making ready to start.

There was a motley crowd aboard, but the ferry-man, a swarthy fellow with a red rose stuck through the ring-hole in his ear, cleared a space, and placed a three-legged stool for her near the centre of the craft.

She wrapped the long cloak closely about her, yet even so a bit of golden embroidery at the edge of her gown showed to the sharp eyes of the rough folk near, and they wondered at the small yellow slippers. The girl did not notice the nudging and staring, but scanned the bridge lest her father might be by one of the parapets looking down, for Davenport was long of sight.

"Art faring to Greenwich, mistress?" said a narrow-faced water-man at her elbow. "There be sports there this afternoon; aye, an' games—the cushion-dance, an' kiss-i'-the-ring; an' there be archery at the butts, too."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"I heard not of it," she answered distantly.

"Gadzooks!" he exclaimed. "Where hast kept thyself? All the men and maids o' London will be at Greenwich to-day. Queen Bess hath given over the palace bowling green for their sports an' mummeries, an' sends down at nightfall a hogs-head o' cherry-sack. I made sure thou wert decked i' such bravery to be mistress o' the revels, though I know not where there'd be a Lord o' Misrule to match thee."

She bit her lip and coloured, for there was a familiar tone in the man's voice.

"The Court, then, is at Greenwich Palace?" she said by way of answer and drawing her stool a little away.

"Marry, no," returned the water-man garrulously. "All the quality be i' London, an' the Court i' Somerset House. I be plying back an' forth past the great landing-stair all morning, an' heard tell there be a joust i' the tilting-yard to-day. 'Tis Sir Henry Lee will unseat every mother's son o' them. They say he is i' high favour with Her Majesty, an' she hath made him her champion. There be gay doings at Court this year. Tilts an' tourneys, an' hawkings an'

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

huntings, an' nights o' revel, an' much joyance o' one sort an' other, though it be dull enow, I warrant, i' Fotheringay Castle for the Queen o' Scots. England need not complain. A merry Court makes brisk trade for the common folk. The times be lively, mistress."

"Is't so?" said Joyce coldly. "I knew not. I' truth, thou art a good vendor o' news."

The water-man smiled complacently.

"Aye, I keep my eyes and ears open," he said, "an' I get my pennyworth o' what's doing, though I say little. There be but two sorts o' men—those who say much an' know little an' those who know much an' say little, an' of this last sort be I. Those who ha' clacking tongues should be tied in the chair an' soused i' Islington ducking-pond. Gossip is the evil o' the day."

"Thou art right," said the girl, nodding. Then she leaned toward the ferry-man with the rose in his ear and touched his arm as he pulled vigorously against the current.

"Wilt stop at the landing below Somerset Palace?" she asked.

"The Queen's stairs?" he asked, smiling. "They be made for such as thee, methinks."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Nay," she answered; "I mean the people's landing well o' this side, good sir. I would do an errand thereabout."

"Well, pray thee have a care, Mistress Davenport," he said in a low voice, drawing his brows together. "There be no worse nest o' dens along the Thames than those close below the palace, an' there be many free-spoken cut-purses afoot along the river-streets."

"I give thee thanks," she returned, "but I ha' no fear."

The people around were a chattering crowd, and a cheery North-countryman dealt out generously among them great yellow pippins, which they ate with gusto. Joyce held the one he gave her in her hand, where it shone like a ball of copper. The little dog curled at her feet and blinked in the sunshine. Against the rough old ferry the river ran and broke, while in their wake was a line as creamy as curds on the brown water. They kept well to the banks out of the road of swifter craft, and shortly the ferry-man pulled in toward a small wharf.

"Here we be, Mistress Joyce," he said. "Shall I stop o' the way back?"

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Nay," she answered, stepping ashore. "I know not when I return."

She stood watching as he pushed out again and then went up the footpath.

"'Tis not every trip you carry such handsome freight as yon," said the water-man to the other with the rose. "Odsfish! 'Tis too pretty a baggage to be alone i' the low river-places. I'd give a three-farthing bit to know her business, gadding about i' such finery, an' ha' a half-mind to follow. I wager she's up to no good."

The ferry-man turned on him furiously, his swarthy face aglow.

"I'll pitch thee i' the Thames an' thou dost not still thy tongue, thou ferret-face!" he said thickly. "That black heart o' thine thinks naught but evil, an' thou art the vilest newsmonger and most arrant gossip i' the water! Let thee out one other such word, or set to wondering what the maid be after, an' I pitch thee out, neck an' crop. Then thou canst follow her at thy leisure."

The water-man settled back sullenly.

"I'd like to see thee try it," he muttered. "The jade belongs to Davenport o' the toll-house—there be no need to say more. Mischief runs i'

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

the blood, an' men do not gather figs o' thistles. She be like him o' face an' like him o' heart."

The ferry-man stopped his pulling with a jerk that made the boat rock and swing round.

In another second he had grasped the speaker and lifted him in his great brown arms. The next he threw him with a mighty heave over into the river, then turned back to his place, settled his jerkin, pulled the rose closer to his ear, and started to work hard upstream, while his passengers laughed loudly and applauded him much.

Such sudden action and evident prowess appealed to the dullest among them.

The water-man came to the surface, blew the water from his lungs, and struck out for shore, but his narrow face, twisted for a moment over his shoulder toward them, bore an unspoken threat.

THE RETURN OF THE QUEEN'S
RING

CHAPTER VI

JOYCE sped along through the reeking, noisome streets, past evil-smelling fishmongers' stalls and tawdry peddling booths. In the very midst of these rookeries stood the palace of the Bishop of Peterborough, with its high-walled grounds, and other mighty prelates of the Church had their dwellings nearby, all enclosed and shutting out the abject wretchedness that encroached too closely for comfort.

Joyce hastened on and up and along the Strand. Men glanced at her curiously, but no one detained her. At last the red gables and many chimneys of Somerset House itself came in sight, as well as those miniature palaces occupied by members of the Court, and called the French buildings.

On the Strand side, where Joyce approached, were rows of store-houses, coach-houses, and stables, for the palace, with its beautiful white fluted columns and marble water-stairs, faced the

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Thames. On the west side was the great tilting-yard, and in the southeast angle were the Queen's private apartments—the withdrawing-room, the famous yellow-room, the coffee-room, the stair-room, and the long gallery and cross gallery, both of which led into a rosery and pleasance, which again opened into a terraced garden set about with many yews clipped and fashioned after birds and beasts of unlikely design. About all this side ran a wall of red brick, in which was set but one small gateway. A white sanded path led to it, and the gate was of oak, studded with iron. Joyce stopped in front of it and looked up at the heavy knocker, which was an iron-wrought thistle, head down. She drew her breath quickly. After a moment, though, her courage came, and lifting the knocker, which creaked with rust, she let it fall. It echoed loudly, and with it there came the sound of much laughing and cheering from the tilting-yard. This continued louder and louder for a little, then died into silence. No one answered the knock and no one went by on the road. A trembling seized the girl and her strength seemed to slip away, while a deadly faintness came over

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

her. She dropped the little dog beside her and leaned against the wall; then, gathering all her strength, lifted the thistle knocker and let it fall a second time.

At the same moment came the cheering again. Some noble gentleman had once more unseated some other noble gentleman, and the world applauded the successful.

Some fresh courage sprang up in the girl's spirit, for it was so goodly a sound, that of those ringing English voices, so strong, so vital, so unstinted.

The colour crept back into her face.

"Thou must go on, Joyce Davenport," she said with quivering lips, "though, marry, 'tis like acting a play an' hath no feeling o' reality. Peradventure i' this world o' trouble there be others that play as difficult a part, an' with a better spirit. I like not a craven heart, nor did I think to own one."

As she spoke there came the sound of slow, uneven steps, and the chain was let down and the key turned stiffly in the lock. The door swung inward, and an ancient man of the Yeomen of the Guard stood in the entrance. His slashed

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

scarlet tabard had embroidered upon the back a full-blown golden rose, and he was lean and silver-haired and held his beef-eater hat in a shaking, feeble old hand.

He bowed to Joyce and stepped aside to let her pass.

"I mightily crave pardon of your ladyship," he said. "A page told me the knocker fell once before. This gateway be little used. Perchance my ears fail me—and my eyes also—for I know you not as one of the Queen's ladies. What can I for your honour?"

Joyce glanced into the old, gentle face.

"Indeed, good sir," she answered, "I am a stranger. I belong not to the Court in any matter, yet I would speak with Her Majesty, if it be possible. See, I have a token which long ago she gave me. If I send it to her, she may be the more graciously willing to see me."

He bowed again and smiled.

"Doubt not that, my lady. Her Majesty will surely see you. She hath straightly charged the guard to turn no one from the gate who urgently desires an audience—though, methinks, in this matter they use discretion. 'Tis the Queen's

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

whim to indulge the masses, and she ever calls herself 'the mother of the people'—whilst with the Court she hath as many humours as there be colours i' the rainbow. But I be an old man whose tongue runs on. Prythee, wouldst intrust me with the token or wilt deliver it thyself?"

"I will give it thee, and thank thee most heartily for bearing it," said Joyce quickly, slipping the ring from her thumb and handing it to the yeoman. "I beseech you, where shall I wait? An' may my little dog bear me company? He hath a shivering fear o' being left alone."

"That may he," said the man. "He is a dog o' breeding, an' such be valued i' the palace."

"Not so," returned the girl. "He is but a stray dog o' the people, kind sir. Look you!" lifting his little paw. "See! he hath two broken toes on each forefoot, as is most cruelly demanded by law; we may not keep a dog o' keen scent and that can run, as surely thou dost know."

"But thou art o' the gentry?" answered the old yeoman, staring.

"So thou dost say," Joyce answered. "Lead on, good master, I pray thee."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

He moved slowly along the path between the clipped yews, through the pleasance and rose-garden, where here and there a late blossom scattered its pink leaves on the grass and box hedges, and so to the palace.

"I will leave thee to wait i' the stair-room. The tilt be over now, and if chance holds good I may meet the Queen's party as they dismount. I be old and receive much favour, having served not only Her Grace, but the King, her father, for many a year. Aye, I be very old. All the gentlemen o' the Court make way for me to approach whene'er they see I would speak with Her Majesty. I will surely give her this ring of thine myself; it shall na' leave my keeping. Have patience for a little space, my lady, and word will reach thee here. Rest thee in yon chair. None will disturb thee."

"I thank thee," answered the girl, watching him as he opened the door that led into a hall beyond. In a way he seemed a friend, this white, weary-looking, ancient man, for he had spoken with a great gentleness.

She listened with sinking spirits to the sound of his halting footsteps, growing fainter and

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

farther off, and then rested her head against the high chair-back and waited.

The old yeoman went on through the palace. None stayed him or questioned, though he was seldom seen away from the pleasance and gateway he watched. He crossed the galleries, the audience-room, the ambassadors' court, and passed the guard at the columned entrance facing the river. A little page in blue and silver, who was flitting up the marble steps, called out to him jestingly:

"Thou art too late for the jousts, Master Ulick. Thou shouldst keep track o' the hour better, for thou lookst like Father Time himself, an' dost only need thy scythe an' glass o' sand. Why dost lurk i' the rose-garden on such merry days? Old hearts like thine—marry, they need some joyance to warm them up, an' the Queen would gladly let thee pass i' the tilt-yard to view the sports."

"Aye," he answered, "Her Majesty denies me naught; but I pine not for life's joyance, little lad. I ask but peace an' a good ending. Prythee, be the games done?"

"Aye, an' well done. Sir Harry is again cham-

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

pion. He hath a wrist o' steel, an' unseated Sir Philip, an' Lord Hunsdon, an' that brown-faced Frenchman, the Count de Simier, three times hand-running! It made my blood hot to see it."

"The Count de Simier? He who is envoy for His Highness, the Duke of Alençon? Is that whom thou dost mean?" said the old guardsman softly, leaning toward the page. "Is that crafty face still about the palace? I thought he had been sped homeward."

"Thou art behind the times, good Ulick!" cried the boy. "Aye, thou art left over from the last reign, old Goodman! Didst not hear he hath been sped homeward and hath returned and still presses the suit for the Duke—though," sinking his voice, "it looks vastly at times as though he pressed his *own* suit with a better heart. He is the Queen's shadow. When they go i' the Folly for a sail, he is at her elbow. When she dances wi' Lord Leicester, his eyes burn an' his great mouth sets in a hard line. I hate him, for that he gripped me once by the shoulder an' fair pitched me out of his way. But, there sounds the trumpet! Watch, an' thou wilt see the gates fly back! I must on with a message."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

The three mellow notes had scarcely died away when the metal gates of the tilt-yard were thrown wide and the gay company poured out.

First came the royal bargemen, who were privileged to see the sports; next a company of swordsmen; then the Yeomen of the Guard, in their slashed scarlet tabards, with the golden rose on the back. Following them, certain servants of the palace in sombre hues, led by the Master of the Household, robed brightly, and with the chain of office about his neck and the keys at his girdle. A scattering of pages—gay little parti-coloured figures—came next; then the Queen's Guard, afterward the lords and ladies of the Court, most of them afoot, and lastly the gentlemen of the tourney, with the Queen herself, mounted on her white palfrey, in their midst.

The different groups separated before the palace and went their ways with much merriment.

The old yeoman stepped forward and waited while Sir Henry Lee aided Her Majesty to dismount. She came up the great marble stairs slowly, and in her purple velvet habit and with the plumed riding-hat shading her gold-red hair and vivacious face, was a most regal figure. Time

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

had not yet been cruel or robbed her greatly, and though among the ladies who followed were some of more brilliant beauty, none had the Queen's stateliness or distinction of bearing.

"I will surely have thee a laurel-wreath made of beaten silver," she was saying laughingly to Sir Henry. "By my faith! 'twas an admirable pleasant sight for me to see thee unseat our friend of France, much as I like and admire him. My gentlemen must be always foremost in the mimic wars, as well as those that are of import."

"We would be first in *love* as well as in *war*, Your Majesty," said the champion, bending toward her.

Elizabeth smiled at the answer.

"That is as it may be," she returned enigmatically.

"Alas! Your Grace," he continued, "the wounds upon our hearts show not, nor bring us pity as other outward ones."

"I fear naught for *thy* heart, Sir Harry," the Queen answered with a short laugh. "No arrow rankles in it yet. If I be wrong, I give thee pity—and pity is akin to love. Marry, thou art a fair courtier as well as a valiant fighter."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"I would have failed had I not caught thy smile across the dust o' the fray," he said eagerly. "At that moment I was scant of breath and done, but I gripped my horse hard and fought on."

"Would that my smile could always aid thee so," the Queen returned; "thou shouldst surely have it. But see, yonder is old Ulick waiting. Now what hath brought him from his rose-garden, I wonder? He hath an anxiety on his mind or I read not his old face, and I have read it since I was a child. Bid him hither, Sir Philip," she said, turning to Sir Philip Sidney.

The dozen or more ladies and gentlemen all waited by the columns while the ancient guardsman approached.

He bowed low to the Queen, his scarlet beef-eater sweeping the floor.

"An' it please Your Majesty's Grace, I bring thee a token," he said in his quavering voice.

"A token, good Ulick?" she said smiling. "In truth, thou art ever trusty. Give it me with despatch."

He handed her the ring and stepped back.

The Queen gave a little start of surprise.

"My thumb-ring!" she cried, holding it up so

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

those who gathered near might see. "The ring the Egyptian soothsayer gave my father in the year he was crowned! He bid him not to *keep* it, but to part with it as he saw fit, and always as a token. 'It will return to thee without fail,' said the strange man. And now I bethink me he was a priest of the old faith of Isis, and could by dreams foretell events. 'Naught will be able to keep the ring from thee,' he said, 'neither the living nor the dead, nor time nor distance, as long as thou and thine rule in Britain. Fear not to give it in token of what thou wilt, to gentle or simple, the ring *will* come back, and with it bring a blessing.' " The Queen spoke with rapid intensity, as though she were moved, and a bright colour came and went in her olive-tinted skin, making her face for the moment almost girlish. Without doubt, strong-willed as she was, Elizabeth did not wholly escape from the superstition of the times.

"My lords and ladies," she continued, "it is most marvellously true that the King parted from this odd token time and again to most unlikely folk of all degree, and invariably it returned, bringing somewhat to his advantage. He be-

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

queathed it to me with the Egyptian story, and I likewise gave it, first to one and then another, with little thought, and it came home as the magnet to the needle. But, by my faith, it is years since I slipped it on the hand of a little maid on London Bridge and bid her show it at the palace-gate if she desired at any time to enter. Methinks," turning it about on her slender thumb, "it hath adventured far—but all is well with the world—it hath returned with good fortune at heel."

"Art assured, Your Majesty, that it is the *very* ring?" questioned a grave, unbending man close by.

"My Lord of Walsingham is nothing if not sceptical," Elizabeth returned mockingly.

"Good Your Grace, it doth not well in this sorry world to be over-credulous," he answered softly.

"Satisfy thyself, thou clever man," said the Queen. "Pray thou *be convinced*. Thou didst know it of old. Here on the under side of the red-veined green onyx is the mystical scarabæus, and on top a roughly cut 'E.' My Lord of Guilford chipped the letter with a diamond when he

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

wore the ring in his dolorous cell in the Tower. 'Twas drawn from his hand on the scaffold and returned to me, blood incrustated," she said with a slight shudder.

"Can Your Majesty recall clearly the little maid or the occasion of giving it to her keeping?" said Lord Burghley, after a pause.

"That can I vividly, Cecil."

"Thou dost know my memory is tiresomely good and tenacious of the veriest trifles. 'Twas a marvellous fair child with eyes that haunted one—sea-blue and black-lashed. Her name, if I heard it, I confess hath slipped from mind, but an old sailor lifted her to the saddle-bow that she might kiss our hand, and something in her face drew my heart to it, and on impulse—as is my way—I gave her the ring. At the day's end, when in my chamber, I discovered that this child bore a perfect likeness to a small portrait which ever hangs on the south wall—but 'tis of no import. Come hither, Ulick."

He came forward, bowing.

"Who brought this token?"

"'Twas a lady, Your Majesty."

"A lady of quality?" asked the Queen.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Aye," he answered, "a proper lady, lovely as a flower; an' though my eyes be old, they were dazzled by the whiteness o' her skin an' the glint o' her hair. She begs you will speak wi' her, an' waits Your Grace's pleasure i' the stair-room."

"Of a surety we will speak with her and give her thanks," replied the Queen. "The return of our ring is a goodly sign, I doubt not. Serve this fair guest of ours as thou dost know how, Ulick. And now," turning to those about her, "now, my lords, we will detain you no further. The jousts were pleasant pastime, but wearisome." Bowing lightly, she swept on through the hall with her following of ladies.

QUEEN ELIZABETH HEARS OF
RICHARD DAVENPORT AGAIN

CHAPTER VII

ULICK, with the aid of a little page, served Joyce with supper and gave her his message.

The girl looked at the service of silver and gold, and the damask napkin broidered with the royal coat-of-arms. There were cakes on crystal dishes, and different kinds of fruit, and a flagon of wine, yellow and sparkling.

"'Tis very beautiful," she said wistfully, "but, good sir, I lack an appetite. Will the Queen tarry long, think you?"

"That is as the mood seizes her," returned the yeoman. "But meseemeth she will see thee anon. She took a rare lively interest in the return of the thumb-ring, and straightway pulled off her glove and slipped it on. Aye, she even remembered parting from it years ago."

Joyce leaned forward, her eyes wide.

"Remembered?"

"Aye, minded her truly, and did on that the

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

whole story unfold. I gainsay there be those at Court wish oftentimes our lady was not blessed with so long a memory, though she never remembers aught she would forget, or the kindnesses she hath conferred, being mightily tactful and gracious.

"But to thy supper, my lady. Coax thy taste, I beseech thee, and at the very least take a cup o' cordial. I was ordered to serve thee as best I knew, and must obey."

"Why, I will surely drink to please thee, then, said Joyce, smiling into his friendly face and raising the cup. "I' faith, thou art vastly kind."

"Not so," he replied. "I serve the Queen in serving thee. There, that is right. 'Tis a warm, sunny wine o' the south o' Spain, and already brings a touch o' colour to thy cheeks.

"I will go, but will leave thee this page. He is a wilful, heedless lad at best, but, beshrew me, my lady, he hath his *orders*, an' thou canst use him as messenger shouldst thou desire aught."

So saying, Ulick bowed and shambled off, and the little, heedless page settled down on the carved black oak bench that ran some distance around the wainscotting, and swung his wilful heels idly

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

back and forth. He made a glittering patch of colour against the sombre walls, and the silver lace on his blue tabard caught the light as he stirred about with a boy's restlessness. The yellow lovelocks on his shoulders were sadly tossed, for he had spent the afternoon in the tilt-yard with the rest, and there had been a fresh, strong wind. Presently, with some joy, he spied the little wire-haired dog and snapped his fingers at it encouragingly.

"Hath he accomplishments, my lady?" said the boy. "Methinks he doth cock his ear most wisely."

Joyce smiled back.

"Nay," she said. "I fear me he hath only a faithful heart to recommend him. If he had been wise, he would ha' stayed with Silas."

"Wi' Silas?" queried the boy. "Is that a man-servant o' thine?"

"Prythee, far more," responded the girl warmly. "He is a right good friend. But thy pardon—I forgot that thou couldst not know."

"None need ask pardon o' the pages," he said. "But wilt not bid thy little dog run over here? I would make acquaintance with him. Come

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

thee," whistling; "be not coy and difficult, small one. Drop not thy tail, for i' faith I be not so monstrous large and fierce thou need shiver at me. Now, pick up heart an' put thy paws on my knees. So. Why, soul's life!" he cried, springing up, "I thought him a thoroughbred, and he is but a stray! He hath the broken toes on his two forefeet. He is not *thy* dog, my lady?"

Joyce sighed.

"Aye, marry, little page," she answered, "he is mine."

The boy looked puzzled.

"Perchance he followed thee, and mayhap thou art weary. Didst look on at the tilt? 'Twas over-long for women, though the Queen ne'er leaves till the very end."

"Nay," said the girl, "I saw not the tilt."

"Then will I tell thee of it to while the time by," he responded in friendly fashion, and began relating with much gusto the deeds of valour of the mimic war, but he did not deign to further notice the small dog.

The dusk settled heavy and gray with fog against the palace-windows.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

A servant in black came through the halls and lit the cressets of candles that branched out here and there.

It grew quiet where Joyce and the little page sat, save for the babbling of his fresh young voice. Now and then there sounded the distant muffled closing of a door, for everything in the palace seemed velvet bound and made no harsh noise. Then a footstep echoed down a corridor. Once there was the tinkling of a lute as some player strolled from one room to another.

The page finished his tale-telling and yawned behind his hand, while now and then he moved from place to place.

Joyce offered him the cakes on the salver, and these, after some demurring, he took, one by one.

"Her Majesty will send for thee after she hath dined," he said cheerfully. "Beshrew me! but that is a vastly pretty gown of thine an' suits thee rarely. Was't cut after an English pattern?"

"I know not, indeed."

"Well, I trow 'twill be all the rage when once the Court hath seen it," he went on. "The tables

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

be set i' the state dining-hall while the French Prince or his Envoy be here. 'Tis all mightily gay an' beautiful, an' I be oft there to pass the comfits. Marry, they always save for me the merry-thought of every fowl, an' the maids of honour—or even the Queen herself, i' she be i' the humour—will *wish*, an' pull it with me. I will let *thee*, next time, an' thou dost stop at Court, for, my faith, *thou* art prettier than *any o' them*," lowering his voice.

"Say not so," said the girl smiling; "it hath a sound o' treason. Surely they teach thee such speeches over-early. But I grieve to keep thee here; thou canst away—I mind not solitude."

"Nay," he answered, straightening his small figure, "I would not leave thee or *any* woman here alone. Know you this room be *haunted* o' certain nights? Old Lady Somerset, who on a day fell down dead in a fit at the base o' yonder stair, walks slowly through it wi' her face all drawn, an' she maketh dismal moan. Not one o' the maids dare come here after dark, for she hath been *truly* seen an' is a grewsome sight. But hark thee! here comes Ulick."

"Wilt follow me to the yellow-room, my

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

lady?" said the yeoman. "Her Majesty receives thee there."

"I thank thee," replied the girl, rising and unfastening the cloak, which fell from her shoulders.

They passed through the gallery, the lights growing brighter as they went on. There were great jars of late roses here and there in the halls, and silver bowls of spiced rose-leaves. The air was warm and heavy with their perfume. From one room drifted the sound of mellow English voices speaking in French, and at a turn of the hall a knot of ladies, all laughing and chatting, brushed past them. They opened their eyes wonderingly at the girl by old Ulick, but rustled on without pause. Presently Ulick stopped by a door hung with great curtains of yellow velvet and spoke to a page who waited.

"We would pass," he said. "Her Majesty desires us within."

On an instant the curtains were drawn and they entered. The room was cool and fresh, and for a breath Joyce was dazzled as by a sudden burst of sunlight, for the walls were hung with soft yellow silk and lit by many candles. There were

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

tiger-skin rugs on the floor, and the place was ceiled with white enamel picked out in curious pattern with gold leaf.

Then she went forward to where the Queen sat, a radiant figure clothed in a long, glistening gown of tissue-of-silver, with bodice and farthingale of Coruscan taffeta, thickly covered with little pearls.

The girl was only conscious of that one presence, and made the grand courtesy, as the ladies of St. Anne had taught her. When she rose and looked up, she noticed two gentlemen standing by. One of them uttered a soft foreign exclamation and stepped a little back that she might come nearer.

"We have received the 'token,' " said the Queen graciously, "and would give thee thanks for bearing it hither, though we dream not how it came to thy keeping. *Who art thou?* Which one of our nobles hath so lovely a daughter and yet hath unkindly hidden her so long?"

Joyce raised her face, and her lips trembled.

"Good Your Majesty," she answered, "what I would say, I would say to *thee alone*, if that be possible."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Elizabeth turned to Lord Burghley and spoke in a low voice.

"Thou hadst best withdraw, thou and the Count, though not far. Is't not a wondrous beautiful child? She attracts me mightily, and I pray Heaven give me grace to deal with any who may have done her harm, for if I read rightly she is in grief of some quality. Pray thee bid the Dowager, Lady Stafford, come hither."

The gentlemen passed out and the curtains fell close again.

"Now, my pretty one," said the Queen gently, "we are alone, for of truth I count not old Ulick. Come, tell thy story."

Joyce glanced up, and there were tears on her lashes.

"I had thought to fear thee, Your Grace," she said softly, "an' I do not. Perchance one should but reverence the Queen; yet, if I dared, methinks I would love thee."

Elizabeth leaned toward her, and a strange expression flashed for a moment into her eyes.

"The Queen commands reverence," she said rapidly, "but of a truth she cannot command love; neither is it a commodity that may be

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

bought and sold, and that which passes for love at Court is often as a gold mixed with much alloy. Therefore, when love is offered us—which is of a pure sort—we take it gladly and as a gift.” Then her tone changed.

“Now again, of which of our nobles art thou the daughter?”

Joyce shook her head.

“Nay, I be not the daughter of a noble,” she said, “but of one Richard Davenport, whom some count a dangerous man, and who, by Your Majesty’s permission, is toll-taker at the north tower of London Bridge.”

The Queen started.

“That strangely handsome man again!” she exclaimed. “That evil man, whose life we spared at the crowning! *Say you so?* But how come you of such gentle speech, and why art thou in this garb?”

“As for my manner and ways of speech, Your Grace,” said Joyce, “it may be I have fashioned them somewhat after those of the gentlewomen of St. Anne’s Convent, for I was long in their care; an’ for my gown—i’ faith, ’twas ne’er sewn for me, but hath rested many years in a

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Spanish sea-chest that was wreckage. My father desired me to wear it against my wedding, which he said would take place to-day when he returned with the priest and Master Gillian at six o' the bell."

"Thy *wedding!* Then why hast come to us?" said Elizabeth, smiling. "Most maids of thy years wed right merrily."

"Nay, Your Majesty," returned the girl quickly, "'tis not so with me. I ha' fearfully angered my father, for I ha' told him I will not wed wi' Gillian o' the bear-gardens, an' I will not. 'Tis by reason of all this I have come to thee, to entreat thy protection. He hath sworn I shall marry this man, an' if I will not, hath promised me worse than death. It is because there is no place i' London where he would not seek an' find me, I come here. When he is angry, he is mad—quite mad—an' fears neither God nor the law."

The Queen rose and spoke a quick word beneath her breath.

"By the Crown!" she exclaimed. "I wonder that such things should be in England! The men here be not Turks, to buy and sell women

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

or force them to their way o' thinking! 'Tis a free land, with liberty of action allowed to all. Thy courage was good, little one. But come, how didst hap to think of the Queen as willing to help thee?"

"'Twas but a sudden fancy," said Joyce. "I crave thy pardon if it be a wrong one. I be-thought me of the thumb-ring thou didst give me on a summer day long past, when I was small, and Silas lifted me to thy saddle that I might kiss thy hand. It all flashed i' my mind, and also that thou hadst bidden me show the ring at the palace if ever I desired to see thee. I doubt me, though, I am over-bold and merit thy displeasure."

"God's blessing of thy heart!" answered Elizabeth impulsively, "indeed thou art not! No subject of all the realm asks protection against wrong that it is not freely granted.

"But come—this man thou wilt not marry—hast somewhat against him?"

"I love him not, Your Grace," returned Joyce, the red flying to her face.

Elizabeth gave a little laugh that suddenly broke.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Love!" she said, her lip curling. "Dost believe it hath aught to do with marriage? Heigh-ho! thou art truly young. It may be thou dost love some other more goodly man than this bear-keeper. We ask thee not. The Queen will be thy friend. If any would take thee away now, they must come through the palace first. We will speak anon of what place thou wilt fill."

Joyce knelt, and, lifting a fold of the silver gown, pressed it to her lips. "I would serve Your Grace most happily. The ladies of St. Anne's have taught me many things. I can broider and work in tambour stitchery. I learnt somewhat in the still-room, and know the virtues of different herbs, and can distil sweet waters. The convent women have fair skins," she went on rapidly, "and compound creams and lotions that work wonders, all of which I make. Moreover, a Swedish sister taught me those passes o'er the face that best dispel a humour, or pain o' a nerve, for there be a charm in the tips o' one's fingers. An'—grant me thy patience—above all, I can while the hours by reading aloud in either French or Latin. Thou wilt let me serve thee, wilt thou not?"

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"That will I, pretty one," answered Elizabeth, smiling; "but here comes Lady Stafford; I will place thee in her charge. To-morrow we will see."

A silver-haired old lady gowned in black lace came forward.

"See, dear Lady Stafford," said the Queen, "give this child a little apartment near thine, and be kind as thou art ever; also send a page to me on thy way out."

Joyce courtesied, and spoke once more.

"I would pray no harm come to my father by reason of my doings," she said anxiously. "He hath been ever kind till of late."

The Queen drew her brows together.

"We will remember thy request," she said. "So, rest well, little one; the palace is a safe place."

When Lady Stafford and Joyce had gone and the curtains fell into place, the Queen sat still in her great chair, save for the tapping of her fingers upon the arm of it. Her oval face was grave and older in repose than when it was animated by swiftly passing expressions.

"That evil man!" she said softly. "That

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

handsome, evil man! Aye, tales have reached me of him from time to time. 'Twas folly to be merciful. And he had swung on Tyburn, this child had not been born. So do I incur responsibilities," she ended with a short laugh. "But ne'er saw I anything so lovely. There is blue blood in her veins by some mischance, I doubt not. 'Tis a naughty world and full o' briars and tangles. Marry, what said she? Yes.

" 'I thought to fear thee, Your Grace, an' *I do not*. If I dared, *I would love thee*—I would love thee.'

"Ah, Cedric!" as a page entered, "bid Lord Burghley hither. Are the dancers assembled, and the musicians—have they the balcony?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. All weary for your coming."

"I had forgotten," she said, "but will not keep them waiting long. How goes the night? Is it fair weather?"

"There is a heavy fog from the sea, Your Grace, and all the vine-leaves are dripping with it."

"Bid them light the grounds well, and set link-boys at the postern gates."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"I will, Your Majesty," he said.

"Then go, and forget not my message to Lord Burghley, for thou art ever a feather-brain little lad."

When he was gone, she noticed the old yeoman.

"Why, Ulick! Art still there? Go thy ways," she said.

When the curtains closed again, the Queen sat alone during one of those rare moments that came to her but by stress of circumstances.

For a space her mind left the details of that delicate diplomatic game that she was ever playing. She forgot the many brilliant figures that her white hands continually moved on what one calls "the world's chess-board." She rested from the intrigues, the ceaseless watchfulness, the constant acting of a part which she loved, yet which taxed every nerve, and, letting the tangled threads of Destiny go, she thought only of Davenport's daughter.

"Meseemeth I am at last bewitched by one of my own sex," she said, half aloud, "and by the potent charm of youth and sweet-hearted innocence. Never before did I see a girl's face that

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

so allured me. If there is not written upon it Truth and Constancy—the two virtues men most lack—verily it doth belie itself and I have read awrong. Ah! Truth and Constancy—the things that elude me, that I seek by night and day, and rarely find.

“What was it she said, again? ‘I thought to fear thee, an’ I do not. I would even love thee an’ I dared.’ My faith! ’tis something to hear such words from honest lips. The child hath a good courage to utter them, and ’tis a quality that likes me well in either man or woman. She was not overawed, neither, nor filled with confusion, but told her story in straight simplicity. Marry, she shall find she hath not trusted me in vain. And this toll-man of the bridge, who by some mischance of nature is her father, hath been troublesome long enough; he shall learn his lesson.”

Lord Burghley entered the room at the moment, and the Queen turned to him with her little inscrutable smile.

“We have purloined five minutes that doth rightly belong to the Court,” she said, rising, “and having spent it in meditation, as the fathers

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

of the Church recommend, are thereby refreshed of soul. Lead on to where the dancers wait, Cecil. Doubtless, though they be outwardly wreathed in smiles, they inwardly rage at our wanton delay of their pleasure."

THE NIGHT OF JOY. SIR RICH-
ARD DAVENPORT CAVERDEN'S
DEATH

CHAPTER VIII

THE fog hung like a gray pall over the Thames, and to be abroad meant danger. Great craft and small made anchor as best they could and where they could, following the law of self-preservation; but a few boats, under pressure of that necessity which knows no law, hugged the shore and stole ghostlike through the mist, ringing a bell now and then that sounded hollow and eerie as that rung by the priests at plague-time for the passing of souls, while the lanterns hung at their mastheads or prows glimmered like will-o'-the-wisps out of the gray and into the gray again.

The dancing-halls on the river-streets kept carnival, and were filled with a motley crowd of sailors from all the world's ports, and their sweethearts of the moment. They were given over to music and boisterous love-making, and mad mirth and merriment grew madder and merrier as the hours went by and the fog crept across

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

the water and rolled closer against windows and doors.

The drinking-houses and taverns were full, too, and in the gaming-houses on the Strand there might be heard the constant clink of gold upon the tables, while fierce words and bitter often broke in upon it. There was no watch about on such a night to dog the people and note their every action. No hand of the law to fall heavy on a man's shoulder and drag him to Newgate, however just his quarrel. So knives were drawn where words came short of settling differences. Often the blood-letting but cooled the head, for afterward the dicing went on right gayly, and the gold and silver bits rang together or were swept into one pocket or another with the high good-will of all concerned. But in other cases where opinions clashed, and the gentlemen interested maintained them with a blow as well as a word, the blow was struck a thought too hard, or driven with a too great nicety to the centre of some danger point, that Heaven knows there are enough of in every man's body. At such times there was a swift and unresisting fall, the sudden sobering of the crowd of fraying and

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

fighting men, and then — exit one — for the Thames was near and kept its secrets.

At the gates of those houses owned by the wealthy prelates of the Church there stood little shivering knots of link-boys, stationed there to tender assistance to any who had lost their way in the labyrinth of by-streets.

The gentle Bishop of Peterborough (he whom the Queen called her “dove with the silver wings,” by reason of the snowy hair which haloed his saintly face) was at Somerset House, but his mansion glittered with light, and was thrown wide open, for his servants knew well that on dangerous nights they were to shelter any who were lost, bewildered, or turned about, and so knocked at the gates.

Somerset House itself hung like a fairy palace on the bank of the river. Every window shone with a warm yellow glow, and through the great halls swept the sound of music and dancing feet, for the rooms had grown overheated, and the outer doors opening on to the colonnade were thrown wide in spite of the mist. Now and then a figure would thread its way in and out between the white fluted pillars, and there would follow

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

the pleasant scent of fresh tobacco and the red gleam of a pipe, as the noble gentleman who wearied of dancing looked out at the night and communed with himself during that dear-bought moment he could snatch from the affairs of the times.

The Queen's barge, the little painted Folly, beloved of the people, with its high gilded prow and red silken sails, was swathed in canvas and hung with lanterns, so that as it rocked back and forth at the foot of the marble water-stair, it seemed changed into some huge uncanny river-beast.

The guards, doing double duty, tramped about the palace-grounds hour in and hour out, and they grumbled to their hearts' content. According to them, there was less need of vigilance instead of more, as Her Majesty had commanded, and one and another, taking French leave, slipped from his place and vanished, to return anon in higher spirits, but with less inclination to stand firmly upon his legs.

The link-boys at the postern gates turned blue and cursed their luck as the long night wore on. There was no friendly crack or crevice they could

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

discover where the link-stick could be thrust and left upright, or they might have curled down and dozed awhile even in discomfort. No, every mother's son must do sentinel duty till relieved—must fill his wretched lungs with the thick air, shake in his shoes, hold his flickering light aloft with numb fingers, and feel the damp creep through his leather jerkin till it reached his bones, while within the palace the pages went in blue and silver and were gorged with sweets, and everywhere it was warm and rose-scented, and the Court danced.

Aye, they danced.

They stepped no longer the grave, slow coranto; it had given place to the galliard and other swifter dances. Here and there were scraps of gossamer lace upon the waxed floor of the great ballroom, or love-knots of ribbon and gold thread.

The musicians in the balcony overhead played wildly on their lutes and tabrets, as though the very spirit of incantation was upon them, for an ecstasy of mirth seemed to have entered into the souls of those who moved back and forth in a brilliant maze of colour below, though out-of-doors the world wrapped itself about like a

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

gray friar, and waited in still patience for the morning.

The Queen, from where she sat, circled by her favourites, looked out over the scene and was graciously pleased. She had gathered around her the very flower of the world—the wit, wisdom, beauty, and chivalry of England—and it gave her keen delight to dazzle and impress this dark, strange envoy of the young Duke of Anjou, this handsome, mysterious man, the Count de Simier, who was ever at her side speaking for himself through his amorous eyes, and, as occasion offered, with his smooth, seductive tongue, for Alençon. She would have him acknowledge the grace, as well as the majesty, of the English Court—a thing he was over-slow to do.

Somewhat of the excitement of the hour had come to the Queen also, and, although she wearied of dancing, she still looked on with lively interest.

“I pray you, my Lord,” she said, turning her animated face toward the French Count, “*this* time admit that never before was so much beauty gathered together in one little spot! See yonder the young Duchess of Norfolk. ‘The dimpled

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

duchess,' as they name her—is she not of perfect pink-and-white freshness? And Lady Rich, dancing yonder with Sir Philip Sidney, who, man-like, sighs and pines for her now she is denied him, though in the past he was monstrous indifferent—saw you any woman in France so wondrous fair as she? As Lady Penelope Devereau she was famous, but as Lady Rich she is of even a more sparkling beauty.”

“Good Your Grace,” he answered softly in his clipped English, “I have no eyes for aught beyond this throne of thine. But, apart from that, and as for the beauty of your ladies yonder, it doth seem to me it hath been far eclipsed to-night by that fair child you gave audience to in the yellow-room.”

Elizabeth smiled.

“In truth,” she answered, “you are of rare discernment, my Lord. Both you and my champion, Sir Henry Lee (who passed her in the hall), are of the same opinion, while as for Lord Burghley, that wise gentleman, so seldom beguiled through the eye or moved to curiosity, is now all questions regarding my little visitor.”

“Which Your Grace will gratify by answering?”

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"I will determine on that later," returned the Queen. "Yet, believe me, there be few tangles my Lord Burghley does not, without our help, unravel."

De Simier stirred uneasily.

"I must bring my courage to the sticking point," he said after a moment, "and beseech Your Majesty again to send some final word to the Duke. I pen a letter to-night when the dance ends, and fain would give him some message of satisfaction. Methinks I am but a poor ambassador and press his suit but indifferently well. Still, in this matter, Your Grace, you have ever listened kindly, and we have hope that you will at last follow the dictates of your own heart and will——"

The Queen laughed lightly, and then a shade swept over her face.

"You know us not, my Lord," she replied, tapping him with her fan. "A Queen of England follows not her own will, and she hath but scant leisure to follow the ways of her own heart. We will reserve our answer to these serious questions, my dear Count, for to-night. Be content with this much: We like you well—though, perchance,

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

more for your zeal than the matter of your suit."

De Simier frowned.

"'Tis as always," he murmured, shrugging his shoulders a trifle.

Elizabeth bent toward him.

"The times are unsettled, my Lord," she said, speaking rapidly. "It may be they breed disturbances we wot not of. Of late, as you know, the fearsome comet that foretold the night of St. Bartholomew hath, they say, again appeared. It hangs above the Tower, though faint and far away. Our mind is distracted by many thoughts. Aye, even at this merry hour, with a dim foreboding of approaching trouble. We catch at good omens, however slight they be," looking down at the Egyptian ring on her thumb and turning it slowly around, "for we would banish care, when 'tis possible, and take what cheer we may from this passing show of life. But, enough. Of your kindness do me the pleasure to search for my Lord Burghley and bid him hither."

De Simier stepped back, bowing deeply, and those gentlemen who pressed forward to fill his

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

place noticed that his face was whitened with some checked feeling of impatience or resentment.

In and out of the dancers he threaded his way, his suit of russet silk overlaid with brocaded gold and his jewelled orders and buckles making him a brilliant figure even there. Now and then he glanced about with keen eyes, but no smiling face, however lovely, had power to stay him, though many would have done so, for the French Envoy, with his dark indifference and wide knowledge of men and affairs, was altogether fascinating to most of the Court beauties. He went silently on his quest through the palace, after assuring himself that the man he sought was not among the throng in the throne-room or antechamber. As he reached the marble court leading to the colonnade, however, he encountered Lord Burghley walking up and down quite alone, and smoking. De Simier delivered to him the Queen's message and stopped a moment to pass some word of the night, when, on a sudden, loud shouting and confused sounds of strife came to them from the river-front. One of the heavy doors was still standing open. The two gentle-

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

men started forward and looked out. There at the head of the water-stair, through the mist, they could dimly discern a swaying knot of men and lights. Evidently the guards were engaged in a fray of some violent nature. As they watched, the group parted and a man broke away and bounded forward. He came on with fleet lightness, his head back, his feet scarcely touching the ground. Mounting the palace stairs, he brushed by Lord Burghley and De Simier, who, desiring to take no part in a night-brawl, and seeing the guard at his heels, made no effort to stop him. Four of the guard came on pell-mell, cumbered as they were with their swinging lanterns and halberds, and moreover being none too certain of foot. Once within the hall, the man turned at bay and struck right and left, madly, with the iron-rimmed punt-pole he carried. The first who followed went down heavily, the second and third staggered to one side at the fierce, sudden onslaught, but the last guardsman, a lusty fellow, dropping everything, drew a short knife from his belt and with a leap forward drove it furiously into the man's side. There he left it, hilt up, in the buff jerkin. The man sank back-

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

ward, making no sound, and the fray that had lasted scarce three moments was over.

Lord Burghley wheeled toward the guardsmen, who drew close together, his face reddened, his eyes flashing.

"You vandals!" he said in his low-pitched voice, cold and cutting as steel, "you scurvy hirelings! Is it *so* you keep watch for Her Majesty? There's not a sober fellow amongst you."

The wounded man, lying at length upon the mosaic floor, raised himself slowly on one elbow.

"Aye, marry," he said with a short laugh, "they be damnable fools! Drunk as lords, all o' them. They be o' rare discernment an' bold front, an' take every honest man for a knave, an' every knave for an honest man. They know not a good citizen from a cut-purse. For me, I came peaceably by the main entrance—to *filch naught, but to recover what is my own*. Somewhere—*here o' Somerset House, amongst you—you have it in hiding*——"

The guard who had been stunned now recovered his senses, and with much groaning rolled toward his fellows.

Burghley, spurning him with his foot and fol-

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

lowed by the French Count, drew closer to the wounded man and looked down curiously, for there was a reckless dare-deviltry about him which commanded passing attention.

De Simier gave a short exclamation in his own tongue.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he said, "but he is magnificent! Where make you such men in England? He hath a body and face like the Greek gods."

Lord Burghley leaned down to the prostrate figure.

"What seek you in the Queen's palace? None come here unbidden, my friend. Yet, what would you, and by what name are you known?"

The man threw back his head with a gesture of indifference. He pressed one hand hard on the hilt of the knife, and a shudder ran through his great limbs.

"It matters not who I be," he said, halting between the words. "Naught matters. I have come to the end. Still, they know me as Davenport o' the Bridge, and I seek here my daughter. She is a wilful little wench an' hath outwitted me. Aye, defied me, an' played me one better; I, who am an old hand. But, Gad!" with a quick

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

smile, "I seem not now to mind. My fury is spent. She hath my spirit, the jade!"

He closed his eyes, and his head fell back.

"'Tis the end," said De Simier, "and—the Queen awaits you, my Lord."

"I serve Her Majesty best here," Burghley answered shortly. "He is not gone, nor will be, till he draws the blade."

Then he spoke to Davenport again.

"Look you, my man," he said gravely, "I hold you of honest purpose and robbed of life by a drunken guard, though 'twas without right you so adventured here. Still, what would you? We know naught of your daughter; but you have scant time, and mayhap desire the office of the Church."

A little smile passed over the whitened mouth.

"My sins be past counting," he said faintly, "and, moreover, I love not the Princes of the Church of England. If so be there is a barefoot friar about, bring him hither."

Burghley shook his head.

"I fear there is naught then we can do."

The man answered nothing and his breath came short and quick.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

The sound of dance-music drifted to them with its measured rise and fall.

Presently Davenport looked up.

"My Lord," he said, "I bethink me I would see the Queen."

"Nay," replied Lord Burghley, "that is impossible, I fear. We disturb not Her Majesty lightly."

"No man's death is a little matter," he returned haltingly. "I would see the Queen. Marry, her subjects have *some* rights, an' 'tis of import."

The statesman turned to De Simier.

"Stay you here," he said; "I will to Her Majesty. Her whim might be to come hither, though one would spare her the scene. When 'tis of the people, she is vastly persistent in knowing all, and on second thought I deem it unwise to deny the man's request. Meseemeth there is more here than shows on the surface."

He strode through the halls, and the French Envoy waited.

Davenport neither moved nor spoke, but the red patch on his buff jerkin slowly widened and his face grew like marble.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

The dance-music went on ceaselessly, and the cool air and mist of the river crept in as far as it might. After a space there was the quick rustle of silk and lace across the marble floor, and Lord Burghley and the Queen herself drew near. With them came a surgeon of the Court.

"Here lies the man, Your Grace," said Burghley. "It may be wise that he should first have his wound examined."

Davenport raised on his arm and looked up.

The Queen stood in all her radiance beside him as she had upon the day when death had once before claimed him.

He fixed his great eyes that with the evil in their depths held also a certain appealing melancholy, on the grave and earnest face turned down to his.

"Good Your Grace," he said, between his short breaths, "bring me no leech, I beseech thee; I will the sooner make an ending without his office. Methinks an' you had let me swing o' Tyburn, 'twould ha' been trouble saved. Yet, I thank you. I ha' tasted life's joyance many times since."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Then he stopped.

"Speak on," she answered gently. "What can we for thy comfort?"

"'Tis for my daughter I would trouble Your Grace," he said. "One saw her enter Somerset Palace at set o' sun—a *lying, weasel-faced water-man*, yet who spoke *truth i' that*. I would ha' wed the wench to Gillian o' the Gardens, though, good Lord! 'twould ha' been beauty wasted. But she fled, an' to *thee*, as I think. She hath a rare spirit an' one unacquainted wi' fear. I came straightway here, Your Majesty, for a man hath a right to recover his own; yet the game is ended an' my anger spent. One cannot bluff Fate."

The Queen looked down in a strange, grave way.

"What comes to us for protection, we give not up, Richard Davenport," she answered. "But we would ask thee in this thy passing hour, *Who art thou*—thou evil, dangerous man, who hath these *two* times brought us to pity thee?"

He gave a mocking laugh through his stiffened lips.

"I be a gentleman, Your Majesty," he said,

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"who hath no right to the name, being born without sanction o' law or church. It may be thou canst call to mind that friend o' King Henry's named Lord Richard Caverden?"

The Queen gave a little start, and Lord Burghley swore beneath his breath.

"We remember him," she answered.

"'Twould, peradventure, be harder to shake him from thy memory," returned the dying man. "He was not of a kind to be easily banished. The King's boon companion; his comrade o' revels. Marry, I be *his son*, though born out o' wedlock. My mother was the daughter o' the keeper o' Caverden forest on the northern border, where the merry parties o' gentlemen went i' the fall o' the year to follow the stag. She was a wench o' sixteen when my father found her out, an' had too much beauty for her own good. Well, the sin be past, an' God rest her soul. *She* atoned, for she died at my birth-ing. I grew to fifteen years i' Caverden forest wi' my grandfather, the keeper, an' was made free o' the castle, an' vastly spoiled by the gentlemen who came i' the autumn; most of all, mayhap, by my father. Aye, *I knew the King!*

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

For strength and spirit there was no man like him in England."

Davenport fell back, the beads of dew on his face, and he pressed the knife-hilt closer.

"Of your charity," he said, "doth Your Grace believe this story true?"

"That do we," answered Elizabeth, her face darkening. "Thou art the facsimile of that light-living gentleman, Lord Richard Caverden, whom the King was pleased to honour. He was a noble who burdened himself with few cares and died unwed."

The surgeon and De Simier stood a short distance off. The guard still huddled together in abject wretchedness, awaiting the descent of justice, and Lord Burghley was by the Queen's side.

"Your Majesty," he said, "there is no repudiating such a likeness. It has puzzled me mightily once before, but now is plain reading."

Davenport raised his eyes.

"I crave word o' Joyce," he said.

"Set thy heart at rest," returned the Queen gently. "She is in our care. Think thou on thy sins, and repent thee."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

He threw back his head in the old defiant way, and for the moment his glazing eyes glittered.

"A man dies as he has lived, Your Grace," he said. "'Tis easier for the body—than I thought. S'death! I would, though, I had na' been so harsh with the maid. She hath my spirit, an' is all—I can call my own, i' the world."

The Queen's face was very white, and some thought seemed troubling her, some mind-struggle, as she watched the life before her going out.

The splash of red on his buff jerkin grew into a great circle, and slow drops fell upon the marble.

The tissue of the Queen's robe touched the crimson, and a little stain crept slowly upon it.

She did not notice, but drew her brows together in sombre thought.

Suddenly, with an impulsive movement peculiarly her own, she turned to the statesman.

"'Tis such another case," she said bitterly, with quivering lips and in a low voice, "as that of *Henry Fitzroy*, the King's bastard son by Lady Talbot. Yet, remember you not, Cecil, the titles my father heaped upon him, making him Knight of the Garter, Earl of Nottingham,

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Duke of Richmond, an'—as if 'twere not enough—*Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland!* It maddens me to think of it—yet, here is one, the son of the King's friend, as *worthy of consideration, still left to his own upbringing.* It savours little of justice, and I wonder nothing he fell into evil. By the Rood! an' I be but a *woman*, I shall set things right, though it be the eleventh hour. Methinks 'tis worth something at times to wear the crown."

"What would Your Majesty?" asked Burghley anxiously, knowing her moods and high impetuosity. "Evil is evil. What can Your Grace toward righting a sin so long ago committed?"

"Of that sin," she cried softly, "hath sprung as fair a thing as any our eyes have seen. Aye, that maid who came hither this afternoon. She is as a flower sprung from the blackest mire, Burghley. Ne'er saw I a pure soul if one shone not from her face. For some reason beyond my fathoming, she hath touched my heart. I, the Queen, who am not easily moved to love. *'Tis this child I would set right with the world.'*"

Then with an imperial gesture she glanced up.

"Lend me your sword, my Lord," she said.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Of Your Grace," he answered, "I pray Your Majesty to do nothing you will regret."

Elizabeth lifted her brows.

"Nay, Burghley! I made thee not the keeper of my conscience!" she answered. "Lend me thy sword."

He drew it from its scabbard and, dropping to one knee, handed it to the Queen, while the light flashed along the blade and jewelled hilt.

"Bid the surgeon come to us," she said.

The black-robed man came, soft of foot and without words.

"Give us assurance, good sir, that this man before us will surely die of his wound," Elizabeth said, turning to him.

The surgeon knelt by Davenport as he lay back with closed eyes, and listened at his heart.

"He will not live a moment after the knife is withdrawn, Your Majesty."

"'Tis well!" she returned. "Stand thou there—my Lord Count, pray bear witness, and you, my Lord Burghley."

Then she took the jewelled sword and touched Richard Davenport lightly on the shoulder.

"Richard Davenport Caverden," she said in

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

the cold, steady voice she used at such ceremonies, "I dub thee our loyal knight, Lord of Caverden and the lands that belong thereto."

Then, with a smile, handed the sword back.

"'Tis done!" she said briefly.

It may be the dying man understood, but as to that they never knew.

De Simier had looked on with his unreadable face, Burghley with some distress, and the surgeon as one dazed.

Before the little group had time to move away, Davenport half raised himself again. There was a light in his eyes, wild and unreasoning, and he looked far out beyond the hall of Somerset House, but his lips smiled gayly till they saw the glittering line of strong white teeth.

"By the Mass!" he said, "but the wench hath my spirit! Now, on the last bit o' my honour, 'tis a thing I hate to do—*Gillian o' the bear-garden*, or Ferrier—'tis—casting a pearl before swine——"

Then his tone changed.

"Didst never hear the story o' the Queen's grace, sweetheart? Beshrew me if there be not enow wagging tongues to tell thee o' it! Right

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

well did my face serve me, an' *thine* is more beautiful. It shall bring thee gold an' high fortune, an' all those things a man sells his soul for. Aye, who knows, lass!—perchance a title to thy name."

He waited, but went on in different key.

"*To Somerset House?* Nay, thou weasel-face, she would not *dare*—an' yet, mayhap, she *would*—Lord! an' thou dost not speak truth, thou loose-mouthed knave, I'll throttle thee 'fore morning— So— So— Comes the King riding this road? Aye, down the green ways o' Caverden forest. The sun is on his red-gold hair, but Queen Catherine—God save her—pines i' Kimbolton Castle. Off wi' the old love—on wi' the new. Gad, 'tis King Harry himself! Hark! there echoes the song he always sings when he is light o' heart!"

Those gathered around listened with bated breath as the high, sweet tenor suddenly broke through the stillness.

Davenport's voice rang for the moment full and rich as of old, and it was in truth the King's own beloved song they heard. "Pastance with good company" he sang:

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

I love and shall until I die,
Grudge who will, but none deny,
So God be pleased, this life will I
For my pastance.
Hunt—sing—and dance,
My heart is set—
All goodly sport,
To my comfort
Who shall me not let.

As he finished, with a quick movement he drew the knife from his side and a flood of red followed. The Queen turned with a little shudder, and Lord Burghley led her away.

THE NEW MAID OF HONOUR

CHAPTER IX

NO sound of music and dancing, no rumour of the disturbance of the night and consequent death of her father, reached Joyce Davenport in the silken-hung apartment adjoining the suite of rooms occupied by Lady Stafford, Mistress of the Robes. According to the Queen's direction, Lady Stafford had taken her there, and, though filled with wonder and brimming with curiosity, was tactful enough to ask no question of one so tired and bewildered. No lady of the Court saw more and said less than the Mistress of the Robes, and her face was one that a child would trust at sight. She treated the girl with all kindness, and directed one of her own maids to stay with her till morning.

Joyce rested, as they bid her, on the couch, and closed her eyes, though she was as one in a dream and felt that at last she was being swept onward blindly, apart from her own volition,

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

and by some force she could neither understand nor resist. Event had followed event so quickly, and she had slept and eaten so little, that now she sank down in utter inactivity, and thought ceased to trouble her. The question of what was right and what wrong took wings. The fear of her father's anger, of the desperate certainty of his following, seeking, mayhap finding, and taking her back to do his will, drifted away. Even Silas and his old sorrowful, weatherbeaten face no longer haunted her and made her heart ache. No sickening horror of Gillian of the Gardens set her trembling, and she forgot the slow agony of the trip up the river, when the ferry-man with the rose in his ear cast smiling, sidelong glances at her from bold, admiring eyes, and the sly-faced water-man plied her with questions and watched her with suspicion, evil curiosity, and inquisitiveness, till their dull fellow-passengers started to wonder and whisper among themselves. The loathsome, noisy river-streets, the swarming, pitiful children and quarrelling women, went from her memory, and the men who stared and smiled as she passed them on the Strand.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

All the crowded, troublesome, bitter hours since the old serving-man had called her to the window and told his story of the juggler of bridge-end, were for a while as though they had not been.

The cheers from the tilting-yard that first revived her courage, the old yeoman of the guard and the little blue-and-silver page, seemed made of a tissue of fancy; the palace scented with roses and lit by its thousands of candles, the merry groups of ladies in the halls, the beautiful room like sunlight on a field of grain, and the gracious, wonderful figure of the Queen, her gentlemen-in-waiting beside her, were as a dream within a dream. The little rough dog that crept against the couch and thrust his head into her hand for a caress, alone brought her a sense of reality.

Lady Stafford's maid sat primly upright far off across the room and watched the girl, thinking she slept. She wondered at her, too—at the thick, wavy light hair, the like of which she had never seen, and the dark, silky lashes lying in a half-moon on her cheeks, at her small hands and the scarlet bow of her mouth.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

But Joyce did not sleep. She heard the bells tell the hours, while behind her closed eyes there was one vision. She saw a man's tall figure clothed in brown leather, flecked here and there with gold tassels, and with a dagger dangling in its blue jewelled case at his belt. Sometimes he was tossing the ivory balls or double-edged knives high into the air, his head thrown back and a confident smile on his lips. Again, he was leaning against the latticed window-frame with indolent grace and looking down into her eyes with eyes that spoke of love. She saw only that one face. She would always see that one face, and the rest of the world would be as nothing. The joy of life was gone with him where he was gone. She had known it for a little while, and would never, never know it again. So she said to herself while the night went by.

High noon was just past when the Queen sent once more for Joyce.

She went with Lady Stafford through the palace to the royal apartments, and they entered what was called "the coffee-room," one often used in the mornings by Her Majesty during

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

her flying visits to Somerset House. It faced the rose-garden, and the Queen was seated with three of her maids of honour by the beautiful emblazoned window. These ladies she dismissed, and then turned toward Lady Stafford and Joyce, who courtesied deeply, while her heart suddenly started to beat as it had never beaten before, and a sense of her own wild daring, coupled with a timidity hitherto unknown, took all strength from her limbs.

She was no longer as one in a dream, but recognised the reality of the scene. This was the great Queen of England, hedged about by all the power of state; whom men fought for and died for, thinking themselves repaid by her smile; whose fleets swept the seas, and whose armies were triumphant. She had but to sign her name and it meant life or death or banishment or liberty, and yet now she beckoned Joyce Davenport to her side.

The girl went forward, all colour slowly fading from her face. By an effort she summoned her courage, lest she give some other sign of faltering or fear.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

The Queen held out her hand, drew her closer, and kissed her on the cheek.

"Didst weep through the night-hours that thou art so pale this morning?" she said gently.

"Nay, I thank Your Grace," Joyce replied, "I wept not, yet my thoughts kept sleep away."

"Marry! thou art too young to have such thoughts, though, well-a-day, they come to all. We would we could be sure of thy bravery; there is somewhat to tell thee that may be hard to bear."

A little shiver ran over the girl, and her eyes grew wide, still she looked up steadily.

"I doubt I ha' been over-bold in bringing my troubles to Your Majesty, but indeed I know not what new one there be."

Elizabeth paused for a moment and turned the Egyptian thumb-ring slowly about. In through the open window drifted the spicy perfume of some late-blowing roses, and from the top of one of the clipped yew-trees a bird broke into rollicking song for simple gladness that the fog had rolled away and the sun was shining on the world again.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Then the Queen spoke again slowly and with a certain softness in her voice that Lady Stafford, well as she knew its every inflection, was unacquainted with.

Bending toward Joyce, she took her hand again.

"Yesternight," she said, "while the fog was thick on the river, thy father sought thee here. He forced his way past the guard at the water-stair and came onward into the palace, rashly and recklessly, yet as one who had no fear. There could be but one ending. In the entrance-hall, whither the guard followed, he was struck his death-blow."

Joyce caught her breath, but uttered no word, and the Queen went on:

"With that bold spirit, which I fancy he hath given to thee, he asked that he might see the Queen. One of our gentlemen brought word of this to us. Well, death is no little thing, who-soe'er it comes to, nor is a death request to be lightly disregarded by any. Therefore, we went to this desperate, adventurous man who once before had by reason of his evil ways crossed

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

our path. Perchance we were not without curiosity to see how such a one might *die*, whether with bravado as he had lived, or with repentance, or in a terror of what might follow. But—now heed thee well and lose no word by bewilderment—in those few moments while thy father was dying and we stood with Lord Burghley by his side, we learned as by a thing revealed who he truly was. There are facts long hidden which, when they come to light, have truth stamped upon them so plainly that all the world may read. He who has been known as Davenport of the Bridge was in reality the son—the only son, so far as it hath come to our knowledge—of one Lord Richard Caverden, for many years the beloved friend of our father, the King; though by legal opinion and the laws that be, Davenport had no right to be called his son, no slightest established claim upon him. But, because of *thee*, who art blameless in the midst of so much sin, we, according to our judgment, set straight this long-crooked matter, and he who entered Somerset House as Richard Davenport, toll-taker of London Bridge, died *Lord*

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Richard Caverden, and lies now in the death-chamber of the palace, though to-morrow he will be taken to the North and buried in the tomb where his father rests—in Caverden forest.

"We will take thee into our care and thou wilt forget thy old name and be known only as the Lady Joyce Caverden. Furthermore, the lands of thy grandfather, which at his death without heirs reverted to the Crown, are now thine."

The clear, slow voice stopped and the girl raised one hand and brushed it across her eyes. Twice she tried to speak, but no word came.

"I pray Your Grace," she said at last falteringly, "to grant me one more kindness. There is at the toll-house at north tower an old man. Oh, he is very old, and sorely grieved and troubled because of my flight! Neither doth he know the cause of it, an' so is the more bewildered and fearful lest harm come to me. I would beseech thee to send word to him of my father"—a sob caught her breath and broke the words—"of my father," she went on, "and of me also, that he may know I be safe; and I would some other

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

might take his watch. He will be fore-wearied by now and needeth rest."

The Queen gave a little laugh that died suddenly.

"By my faith!" she cried, turning to Lady Stafford. "Here is one who can afford to disregard our favour, and treat it with indifference. At the moment of hearing she hath come to an estate worth some consideration, and a title perchance worth more, she doth fly in thought straightway to an old sailor, and is more burdened by his unhappiness than uplifted by her own rare good fortune. Truly, we have not found many such."

Then looking at Joyce:

"Dost grieve for thy father, little one?" she said.

The girl's eyes filled with slow tears.

"Aye, Your Majesty," she answered softly, "that do I. Mayhap I did wrong to leave him, an' should have done his bidding."

"Think not so," the Queen answered. "Thou didst do right."

Then she rang a bell that stood on a table by her side, and a page entered the room.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Hath Ettrick returned?" she questioned.

"He hath, Your Grace, and awaits your pleasure."

"Bid him hither."

A stalwart yeoman of the guard entered and saluted.

"Hast brought word from London Bridge, Ettrick? We would know who watches the gates at north tower?"

"They be not watched, Your Majesty," the man replied. "The riders pass back and forth freely without tendering toll."

"And is there no one about the toll-house?" asked the Queen, lifting her brow. "We thought there was an old sailor on duty."

"Truly, there was an old sailor," replied the yeoman. "They found him bolt upright on his chair in the shadow of the tower at daybreak, so the gossips told me, an' he was stone-dead an' stiff as though the breath had left him some hours; but whether he died through violence—though he looked it not—or by the visitation of God, none knew."

Joyce Davenport listened to the man, her

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

frightened eyes fastened on his impassive face; then she grew blind to all around, and with a little, inarticulate cry wavered and fell at the Queen's feet.

HER MAJESTY REMEMBERS LORD
YELVERTON

CHAPTER X

A WAY in Scotland, that rugged country so torn by civil wars, embittered by political strife, and vexed by religious quarrels and questions, in the great hall of a lonely castle far to the north, two men were talking together by an open fire on Christmas eve.

It was an ancient house this, and had at one time belonged to the Crown and been regarded as a fortress. Behind it was the solid rampart of the hills, and before was the sea. Dense forests stretched away to the west, and to the east were the wild moorlands. Few roads led to it, and yet, report said, Queen Margaret and the baby king, with their small court, had found their way hither in the troublesome days following the death of King James on the field of Flodden.

Be that as it may, by the changes and chances of life the place had passed into the hands of a private gentleman, who had been willing to en-

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rich the impoverished royal purse heavily for the privilege of owning the seldom-used but historic castle. At the death of this private gentleman, one Frazer of Dundee—a dour, unmarried man, over-strange in many ways, but one who had revenues of wealth and knew how to make and keep money as well as spend it—the estate was left with the balance of his possessions, both gold on land and merchantmen at sea, to his heirs.

These heirs were of his own choosing and appointing. The first named was a young girl, his niece and ward, and the second was Lord Henry Yelverton. There were, unfortunately, certain conditions entailed upon them before the wealth of Frazer became theirs—arbitrary, unpleasant conditions, that hedged about his belongings, and were of a keeping with the man who made them. If he had desired to render his memory hated instead of loved by the recipients of his bounty, he could not have taken a straighter course to that end. However, these conditions, being of a simple yet unyielding nature, impossible to be overcome by wit or strategy, had been carried out to the letter, if not in the spirit. The

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

law, therefore, professed itself satisfied, which is saying much, for the law has many eyes and uses them with a fine zeal to discover loop-holes, discrepancies, or flaws in the deeds and documents of a dead man.

The red, wintry sun shone through the emblazoned window of the hall where the two men were talking, and flecked the dark wood floor with brilliant colours from the painted panes. The hall was hung here and there with storied tapestry, and it was ceiled with cedar. The doors and wainscotting were curiously carven, while in the stone-work of the chimney-place was cut deeply the Scottish coat-of-arms. Here and there on the walls hung pieces of armour long since passed out of use; sinister things not good for a woman to look upon; heavy, deadly things, bearing testimony to the strength of the men who had borne them, and speaking by many a dent or ragged tear of the service they had seen. And there were trophies of the chase as well, made fast to the black oak panelling that alternated with the tapestry; huge antlered heads and the heads of boars with mighty curving tusks, and the masks and brushes of foxes.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

There was no trace of any woman about the hall, no flowers, no bit of pretty work, no virginal, or tambour frame, or little embroidered footstool; but instead, on a table, there were pipes of many fashions made by the red Indians of the new western country, and beside them there were gauntleted riding-gloves, and a man's deep-brimmed hat circled by a leather band caught up with a jewelled buckle. And there were whips hanging in a rack, and a hunter's horn. A stag-hound lay at length on the hearth and stretched himself happily in the heat of the fire.

"The little lads will be home for Christmas, master," said the elder man, stooping to push back a burning log and sending showers of golden sparks into the yawning black mouth of the chimney.

"Aye," answered the other, a tall and handsome man whose hair was sable-silvered. "Aye, the little lads will be home, Michael. Belike their mother counteth greatly on it. Well, they are clean-limbed, straight-featured children, and of keen wit—though that latter must perforce have been bequeathed them by the bailiff. Heaven knows their mother assuredly hath it

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

not to spare. Nay," he continued, smiling and turning his broad back to the fire, "look not so at me, good Michael. I mince not words with thee, though to others I am close-mouthed enough. Whatever the father they were begotten of, or the mother who bore them—egad! I give you my faith on't, the little lads are all they should be, and are enough to gladden any woman's eyes."

The old man stooped lower over the fire, and his hands trembled. Presently he spoke again in gentle, half-hesitating fashion, and with a strange wistfulness in the faded eyes that nervously sought the other's face.

"Thou art a happy man, my Lord, art thou not, with all this of life's comfort?"

The one he spoke to gave a short laugh that broke and died away.

"Happy, good Michael? Is any man so, think you?" he answered after a moment. "Happiness is a thing that vanishes as we grasp it. It is the will-o'-the-wisp that ever leads us on, an' many a quagmire and quicksand wait for the feet that follow it. Happiness is that that comes to us in dreams, and leaves us when we waken.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

'Tis the hour we look *back* to, or *forward* to, but never, God wots, the hour that strikes. Perchance when a man longs madly and with but the one desire in his soul for a thing, he is as near to happiness as he can get i' this world. We dream of a paradise, but meseemeth we never enter. The portcullis is always dropped ere we reach it. Still, why should I not be happy, as you, old one, take meaning of the word, for maybe we understand it not alike? What have I missed of the best? I am staid and marvellous healthy, sober-minded, and of a steady prosperity. I have no debts to keep me awake o' nights and distract my creditors by day. I have more gold than I need; *town*-houses that I hate, an' *country*-places that I love. Marry! I can shoot and fish, kill the wild things Heaven hath made, and so it comes, enjoy myself to the full. Truly, the gods seem to love me, although I die not young. But fancies strange and odd and outside of aught we do in the common days that follow each other monotonously, come to the best and worst of us at times. Once in my life—*just once*—good Michael, it seemed that fleeting, evanescent thing called happiness became *real*,

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

and was for a little space fairly within my grasp. Well-a-day! 'twas long ago, and whether by misfortune or by fault it slipped from me, which goes to prove the truth of what I told thee. The lightness o' heart, the joy o' life, of which a man is capable—nay, he reaches it not this side Heaven; and so he takes what lies nearest his hand—some *substitute* for that he *would* have, and makes believe to be content. Hearken, I will tell thee somewhat.

“Last night, when I reached home, I slept heavily, for in the storm I had twice lost my way on the moors, and had ridden about in a circle that covered many miles ere I got the right road. Gad! I earned my sleep and the dream that came with it. It went in this wise: One came to me shining as the sun and beautiful of face—an angel perchance, though there be others better able to judge of that than I. On his head there glittered a circlet of stars, and the great wings that bore him were of dappled silver. This shining one spoke in marvellous sweet manner and said: ‘Don thou thy brown leathern suit, Yelverton, and go out into the world upon a

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

quest. Look through the East, and through the West, through the white North and the far South, *for a flower*. Somewhere it groweth, for thee only to pluck. None other may have it. White it is and pure, and when thou seest it the whole earth will hold naught else for thee. In the golden heart of it lieth a potent of love that *only thou* mayst find.'

"So he spoke, and so I went, good Michael, and long I searched. But not in the east nor the west, nor the north or south, was the flower that lured me on. And then, when I had all but grown weary of my quest, I found it blowing upon the old bridge in London town. Of the sweetness of it I cannot tell thee, but as I would have taken it, there came a wind, strong and terrible, that broke the fragile stem and drifted the flower away across the river, and so out to sea."

The man stopped speaking and laughed again, as at his own fancy, a short laugh, half-bitter, half-sweet. Then he touched the old servant on the shoulder, as he bent over the fire, his head far down, his locks shading the worn face.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"There be happenings in life not easy to banish from mind," Yelverton said musingly, "unforgettable things, and, strangely enough, oft brought about by trifles or the commonest chance. Such a one, mayhap, will change the whole complexion of the world; either light it with a golden glow or unhappily bleach the colours from it and leave what was a place of rainbow hues, a gray waste. Aye, more; these tricks of Fate at times sear the very soul of a man."

He stood for a moment looking absently into the heart of the fire, then threw off the train of thought by an effort and shrugged his shoulders lightly.

"Enough of sad reflections!" he said. "This was but a dream, old one—but a dream. I should not trouble thee by prating of a fancy o' the night that had no better ending."

Old Michael did not answer. A trembling ran through his limbs, and his body seemed to shrink. Twice he opened his lips to speak, but no sound came. He was as one who battled to gain mastery of himself; then on a sudden he lifted his drawn face and his voice came.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Nay, not so, master!" he cried with tremulous eagerness, "'twas no common dream. *'Twas a vision*—and retold that long-past story of the maid o' London Bridge. Does it then still haunt thee, and dost still remember after all these years? Marry! I had not thought so! In very truth, I had not thought so."

Yelverton laid one hand on the quivering shoulder.

"Go to! Go to!" he said gently. "There is naught to vex thee so in my remembering. For all that happ'd then, *thou* hast no shred of blame to give thyself. You would have spared me what I suffered an' it had been possible, I know right well, old friend. Look you, then. There is an ancient story in the Persian—which some of a certain faith believe—that God gives to each but half a soul, and that somewhere in His universe sojourns its mate. We are imperfect things enough, Heaven knows; there may be truth in the tale. If so, by my faith! I believe I once came across the other part of this vagrant, unhappy soul o' mine. It lived in that little maid we both remember, Michael, and was of such a

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

rare perfection methinks it could have taken mine—sin-blackened as it was—to Paradise with it, an' I, too, had died.

“Truly I have not forgotten those short weeks and all that came in them. Mind you how I juggled day after day at bridge-foot? How scanty were the pence; how few and desperately far between the silver bits that rattled into the chapeau. How the people would gather and gape with wide eyes and mouths while I tossed the knives—half afraid, for that report had it I was akin to the Prince of Darkness himself! Little by little we made the sum we needed, and with it helped tide over a few dull hours for the poor river-folk.

“Egad! I know not that any days o' my life passed more merrily. While at night—at night, Michael, I walked straightway into heaven! 'Twas not beyond the stars—as most men think—but no farther away than the old toll-house at north tower o' London Bridge.

“Heigh-ho! Noel-tide carries us back over the way we have come. Yet, think not that I quarrel with Fate. These days suit my temper,

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

spent as they are out-o'-doors in this chill, misty country. One grows *like it—a very part of it*—as time slips by. Being a man, and made withal of a tough fibre that hath not yet quite lost its spring, I take joy out of mere living, as much as most. But 'tis *mere living*. To work—to eat—to sleep; sometimes to dream—and so over again. Oh, aye! Yes, old one, from your face I know what you would say—'*your wife*.' Say it not then, I pray thee. Our marriage, as you know mightily well, was a marriage of convenience—no more, no less. A straight means to a much-desired end. A devilish necessity. Well, when a man hath no love to offer a woman, in such case it matters little to him whether she be Juno herself or a sun-blackened Moorish wench. And for the other side, the lady in question would have wed me—under the circumstances—had I been cursed with the evil heart and crooked back of the villainous Richard himself.

“I may tell thee now, that to guard against all misunderstanding we made certain agreements. Simple agreements and easy to abide by, as was reasonable in good sooth, considering all

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

things. Through the years we have kept to them and lived as best we could. Any other way, in spite of thy kindly hopes, would have destroyed peace, the one thing left us, and peradventure brought misery or madness to one or other. At least I leave such experiment to men of different mettle."

A silence fell between the two again. The red light died away in the west and turned to gray. In the hall there was no sound but the crackling of the fire and the restless movements of the stag-hound on the hearth.

Old Michael turned at last as though making up his mind to speak again and of some doubtful subject.

"I would ask thee, my Lord," he said, "seeing it has pleased you to speak to-night of that long-gone time, whether—whether 'twas ever known for a very certainty—ever proven, that—that—little maid of the toll-taker's came, past doubting, to her death?"

"Aye," Lord Yelverton answered softly, his eyes on the fire, "past all shadow of doubting, good Michael. The old bell-ringer told me.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

And he saw. A young ferry-man also, who had truth in his face, was eye-witness of it. Yet never have I known or been able to fathom what reason — what desperate reason — could have driven her to it. Perchance she distrusted my good faith—though I know not why. 'Twas all a very coil, a mystery I would give my life to solve. The disappearance of Davenport that next night in the fog and mist but adds to the riddle. No word or sign of him was ever discovered; no tidings from any quarter of whither he went, and to add to that, on the morning following, the old sailor who kept the gate in his absence was found dead, sitting upright at his post. There was no mark of violence upon him, yet his face wore a look of horror. The breath had been out of him for hours, for he was stiff as though frozen. Oh! I saw him, for I haunted the bridge three days and three nights waiting for—I knew not what. Mayhap just that they might bring me word the white body of a girl had drifted to the Thames bank somewhere, or been found in the weeds of the marshes. I have never spoken of it during all these years,

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

and marvel I do so now, *but you knew*, old one, for you followed and kept me in sight through those hours, and in a measure understood."

He paused for a moment, then went on swiftly.

"Aye, 'twas the devil's riddle. Yet what is a mystery to *me*, must be clear to some living soul. *Someone* there is who knows why she took her life. So I ever believed."

The old lined face turned half away from him, and in the fading light the features seemed to grow sharper.

"If thou didst ever discover such a one, my Lord," said the voice, halting between the words, "if any had *poisoned her mind*, or told her aught to turn her from thee and it came to thy knowledge, what wouldst thou with such a one, master?"

Velvety gray shadows slipped in now through the painted windows and across the polished floor. Out-of-doors a blue-white, ghost-like mist came crawling slowly in from sea, a formless, deadly thing that covered living creatures before their time as with a shroud, and settled like a winding-sheet about the purple hills.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Where the two men talked, the place was very quiet. With a muffled sound the cinders dropped in the ashes and the big logs broke and fell into a bed of red coals.

"It is ten years ago and past, is it not, good Michael?" Yelverton answered at last in a low voice. The words came in a slow, passionless way, yet they burned into the soul of the old man who listened. A tone in them chilled his blood. The peaked face stared through the growing dusk.

"Ten years," the steady voice went on, "ten years of green springs and summers, of drenching autumn-rains that swept the moors, and of unkindly winters. A long enough time surely to breed forgiveness for any wrong. Vastly enough time, as the world counts it, to have forgotten ten times over. Yet, if I came on such a one as you mention, Michael, *I would kill him!*"

The frail figure opposite swayed, then, putting out one hand, steadied itself against the mantel.

A door at the far end of the hall opened and a servant entered, bearing lighted candles.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Your Lordship, a messenger waits in the outer hall," he said. "One who hath ridden post-haste from London."

"From London, Yorrick?" said Yelverton. "Beshrew me, 'tis a season of bad weather and dark days for such a ride! Show him hither."

Michael turned to follow the servant.

"Nay, not thee, Michael," said his master. "There is no haste for thee to go. Fill thyself a cup of sherry-sack from the flagon yonder. Thou art over-white, or else 'tis this yellow light from the candles turns thee pallid. Cheer up thy heart, old friend, and hear the gossip from London with me. 'Tis doubtless but a carrier who brings Christmas letters to the neighbourhood—though we expect to be forgot as far north as this. Ah! he comes now."

The door at the end of the hall swung open again and a man entered. He was dressed in the beautiful dark uniform of the Queen's private guard, and upon the sleeve of his tabard glittered the imperial coat-of-arms.

Going forward, he bowed deeply to Lord Yelverton, then thrust his hand into a hidden breast-

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

pocket and drew forth a letter, which he handed to him. It was written on parchment and bound about with purple-silk floss, sealed where it was tied with the Queen's seal.

"From Her Majesty!" exclaimed Yelverton, turning it to the light. "From Her Majesty!"

"When was this intrusted to you, good sir? Have you lost time in bearing it from Court?"

"Not an hour, your Lordship," he answered. "I was bidden to speed, and so rode in hot haste, changing horses as they failed me."

"In truth, you bear the marks of fatigue," replied Lord Yelverton, "and have earned a night's rest out of the saddle. I thank you for your despatch. See, Michael, that naught is lacking for our guest's comfort."

When the two men had gone, Yelverton stood in puzzled thought with the letter in his hand. He turned it slowly about and read the superscription without breaking the seal.

"From Her Majesty," he said again, half aloud. "Now, what hath brought me to her mind, I wonder. Rather," smiling ruefully, "rather, I should wonder what hath banished me

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

from her mind so long. She is not given to forgetting the young and strong and useful of us who bear titles. There is no peer in England but feels the Queen's bridle and reins. They may be of silk, and it may please Her Grace to let them hang idle on his neck awhile, but when she wishes to put him to his paces—Gad! her small hands can draw them taut enough.”

Then with an impatient movement he broke the seal, unfolded the crackling parchment and read. There were but a few lines written in the bold, beautiful hand he knew. When he finished, he gave a short laugh, folded the letter again and thrust it into his doublet.

“So,” he said, “so.”

Then he picked up a pipe from the table, filled it slowly and lit it with a coal from the hearth. When the rings of smoke went circling upward, he leaned down to the table again and touched a bell.

Presently Michael entered and stood waiting.

“See my traps be packed, good Michael,” he said. “I ride on the morrow to London—and to Court—by the Queen's command.”

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

The man said nothing, nor by look or sign expressed surprise; still he waited.

"Do you ride alone, my Lord?" he said at last.

"You go with me, Michael," Yelverton returned, flashing a smile at the eager face through the haze of smoke. "You go with me as long as you wish to, old friend."

TOUCHING ON SOME EVENTS IN
THE PASSING OF TEN YEARS
AT THE COURT OF ELIZA-
BETH

CHAPTER XI

TEN years had slipped by since the night of sea-mist and darkness when Richard Davenport met death in the hall of Somerset Palace. Of that death, those who knew said little. The drunken guardsmen who had looked on with dazed eyes and scattered wits at the simple ceremony of his knighting, comprehended nothing of the import of it, nor would they have been believed had they repeated the tale. The Queen's whims were many and varied, so the people knew, but there was a limit to even their credulity, and the world is slow to believe that facts are stranger than fiction. As for the guardsmen themselves, the events of that troublesome night had time to fade from their memories long before they were released from Newgate, for they were given safe escort there at break of day following the tragedy, and it was many dolorous months ere they walked the streets of London free men.

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Lord Burghley did not need the command of silence Her Majesty laid upon him regarding the passing of Davenport, and De Simier was ever a secretive and silent man. His mind was chained fast to a few matters, and these were of such imminent importance and required the exercise of so much tact, diplomacy, and patience, that they swept all littler things away. The impression of the death-scene in the great hall stayed with him as the memory of a picture in which the central figure had been unusually fine, and where the setting was curious and interesting. But life had been tiresomely full of incident to De Simier. This one touched him not at all. Twenty men of obscure birth might have been wounded by the castle guard and knighted by the Queen, to suit her passing humour, and it would not have affected the French Envoy, while whether they lived to enjoy their honours or died of their wounds would be of equal indifference to him. He, with Lord Burghley, had no need of the command to silence.

About Somerset House at the time the gossip had winged its way that one Lord Richard Caverden, arriving late at the palace, had encountered

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some difficulty with a drunken guard, who had drawn a dagger and struck him his death-blow. That the body of this unhappy gentleman had been embalmed and laid in the death-chamber was also known, while further it was reported that the Queen, Lord Burghley, and Lord Caverden's young daughter, whom he had brought to Court with him, visited him as he lay ready for burial. Thereafter his body was carried the far and difficult journey to the long-sealed vault of his fathers at Caverden, a densely wooded estate that few knew, as it lay upon the vexed north borderland.

The Lady Joyce Caverden remained at Court under the Queen's protection, and shortly took her place among the younger Maids of Honour.

Still, about the whole story, in spite of the consummate skill with which it had been woven and set afloat—none could say by whom—there was an air of improbability and of suppressed truth; a certain unreality and mystery pervaded it and made it hard of belief.

That one Lord Caverden had been laid in the death-chamber, there could be no doubt. Two

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yeoman of the guard had carried him there in the hour before dawn. The royal embalmers also had whispered it about that never had they seen the body of such a man; he was like a thing of carven marble, they said, and lay six foot four inches upon his bier. By order they had clothed him again in the beautiful buff garments, and the Queen herself had covered the red stain on the doublet with her own handkerchief of lace.

Notwithstanding all this, there were those who maintained that Lord Richard Caverden, King Henry's good comrade, had died unwed and without an heir, whereupon the lands of Caverden reverted to the Crown. However, none had more than their unaided word for this, and unproven words go at small value. That the dead man had been strangely unknown was conceded, but that Her Majesty accepted him as the son of her father's friend, there could also be no denying. In truth, she spoke to one and another, quite simply, of her sorrow for the tragedy. Still, no one dared question her in any manner or give voice to the curiosity and doubt that consumed them. Such a question would have been frozen

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back upon the lips of the person who uttered it by a word or look of the Queen, so that even time would have had no power to obliterate it from memory. And the matter had to stand. A little page gossiped of how he had spent an hour in the haunted stair-room with Lady Joyce Caverden, had kept her company and eaten the frosted cakes Ulick brought, for she would touch none of them.

He told of the quaint, short-waisted gown she had worn, unlike in fashion any he had seen, but far more beautiful, and he dwelt on the smallness of the high-heeled yellow slippers also. Indeed, he stoutly held that she was a very fairy princess for loveliness, and straightway fell out of favour with the Maids of Honour by reason of certain frank comparisons he drew between the new lady of his heart and themselves.

Hearing this report of the little page, some said it went to prove that at least the Lady Joyce arrived earlier at the palace than her father, though that was a small matter one way or the other and set no questions at rest. There was also the chatter of the strange Egyptian ring being brought by a maid to Her Majesty, but

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those who asked Ulick regarding that, went away more puzzled than they came; for the old and the wise say little.

So rumours crept about, and the coming of the new Maid of Honour was a nine days' wonder. Report said she had fainted away at the Queen's feet when the death of her father was told her. Therefore, she certainly had not known of it earlier.

Lady Stafford knew the whole truth, and the Court physician could have untied some of these tangles for the light-tongued feather-brains, who were vexed by what they could not fathom, but Lady Stafford kept her own counsel, and the Court physician was a cross-grained, irritable man to all but Her Majesty, and few plied him with questions.

In this wise it came about as there were so many connecting links lost in the story of the Lady Joyce Caverden—links the gossips could not recover and set in place, search they ever so diligently—there grew about her a certain mystery.

That she took her place among the Queen's ladies as one to the manner born there was no

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gainsaying, and her beauty was a thing beyond dispute. There are types of beauty upon which the whole world agrees, even as throughout the universe—on this star, and every other—there can be no question of the loveliness of a rose, for now and again God creates something perfect, to satisfy Himself and show the world what is possible.

The Lady Joyce Caverden was sweet also—as a rose is sweet—as unthinkingly, and as much because of her nature. What was evil in those around her she failed to see, though she missed no faintest good in any, and being most gentle and courteous to all, she received for the most part gentleness and courtesy in return. But she did not often smile and was never merry as the others of her age, while in her eyes grew that melancholy expression that had touched the Queen's heart in the eyes of Richard Caverden. All the little pages were her friends, and the yeomen of the guard doffed their scarlet beef-eaters to her as deeply as they did to Her Majesty, making her a particular obeisance they gave no other lady of the Court.

Old Ulick, whom neither flattery nor charm

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could set a-talking, told her stories of the days of King Henry's youth when his heart was unspoiled, and no evil of the world, the flesh, or the devil, had touched him. He drew pictures of the debonair boy of twenty, who had the strength of ten. According to the old yeoman, the King could draw the long-bow to his ear and hit a farther mark than any of his archers. He could unseat every knight in the tournament; could tire outright twenty strong horses when he rode, and on foot could outrun his swiftest runners. No memory of those later days, when the freshness of the morning was gone, and the world-weary autocrat hardened his soul against all good, dwelt with Ulick, nor did he speak of them. To him King Henry was always King Harry of England, the beautiful boy-king, with red-gold hair, and a love-song on his lips. He often told Lady Joyce of her grandfather as well, whom he remembered as the most favoured of all the Court gentlemen.

In time it was granted by those who still took interest in the matter, that Lord Caverden must have wed disastrously, and had reason for keeping silent regarding his wife. That his son and

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heir came rightfully to his own, no one had courage to doubt further. What had the mark of the royal sanction and acceptance was beyond cavil of others.

That those butterflies, the Maids of Honour, were bitterly jealous of Joyce Caverden was quite true. She read smoothly in the Latin, and spoke French as a French sister of the Convent of St. Anne's had spoken it to her, which was to English-bred girls a thing of aggravation. Then her stitchery was to be wondered at, but not attempted, and she could distil sweet waters from herbs and flowers, a most admirable and desired art.

Furthermore, the Lady Joyce did not know anything of the Court scandals, nor would she gossip, and, in spite of her gentle speech, had ever with her a little cold, indifferent way that bespoke a temper which cared not in the least for what the world thought, and was not easily stirred by praise or blame, either spoken or conveyed by other means.

And these grievances were not all. Above every other the gay Maids of Honour had against

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the girl was this : the *Queen loved her*. And next, and equally fatal in creating dislike, the gentlemen of the Court followed her with eyes that said more than words, to those who understood the language.

If the Lady Joyce had had knowledge of these many undercurrents of feeling, she gave no sign, but went in and out among the other ladies, taking her place as it fell, either near Her Majesty or farther away, with a simple composure unreadable and baffling to those who noted it.

But these jealousies and heart-burnings were of the past. Ten years smooth away much dislike that has no real ground for living, and the years had gone by. The young beauties who had been Maids of Honour to Her Majesty when Lady Joyce Caverden first came to Somerset Palace were Maids of Honour no more. They had all married, and their places were filled with fresh and lovely faces. These new ladies thought little and cared less for bygone gossip, affairs of the hour being enough to keep their minds and tongues busy. They allowed Lady Joyce her

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place as the Queen's favourite and grudged it not at all, for it seemed she had always held it by some right. Neither were they jealous of her, for, while she was most beautiful, she was older than any of them and it was quite certain she would never marry, though no reason was forthcoming why she should not. It was said she was indifferent to all men, but most coldly sweet and indifferent to those who loved her. To the Queen, who disliked her favourites of the Court to marry, and was annoyed by the changes that constant weddings brought about, this trait in the character of Lady Joyce possibly recommended itself more than any other. At least she extolled it as a virtue to any and all by whom it was mentioned, dwelling upon it at tiresome length to those whom she had reason for thinking disagreed with her.

Time had been no enemy to Joyce Caverden. She was taller, and the slender lines of her figure were more perfectly rounded. The pink no longer flew in and out of her face as in those far-off days, for she was not easily moved to any emotion. Indeed, there was less of pink against the warm white than there had been, though the

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texture of the skin was still smoothly fine as the leaf of a flower.

Her silvery, blond hair waved in soft fulness about her head as of old, but the colour had deepened by many tones.

The artificial, luxurious life of the Court, with its intrigues, complexity, and polished heartlessness, had left her unspoiled, by reason that while she was in it she was not of it. A certain simplicity of thought and action kept her apart from what would have harmed her, and withal she had a boundless charity and thought no evil.

No woman of the day was more courted or desired, for she was very beautiful, and while dwelling in the sunlight of royal favour wielded a strange influence over the Queen.

Love was a thing that came to her but once. There was no man who loved her but felt the hopelessness of his passion, the madness of thinking she would change. To all men, as the little chattering Maids of Honour who watched her said, "the Lady Joyce was as kind as she was admirably indifferent," and they who flirted, courted compliments, lived on the cream of flat-

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tery and the spice of coquetry, marvelled at her as a wonder past comprehension.

To the Queen alone Joyce Caverden showed a warm tenderness, for something hidden in the depths of that strange, unsatisfied, subtle nature—that was more unforgiving to its own sins than it was to those of others—appealed to her pity as well as her love.

She knew no fear of Her Majesty in any mood or temper, and by a thousand ways charmed her in her hours of bitter discontent and weariness of all things. For these ten years had not been kind to Queen Elizabeth. They had stolen the last remnant of her beauty, bleached the gold from her hair, and set the pitiful marks of age upon her face. Her lithe grace of movement was gone and she grew angular and lame. Against all these changes her fierce pride rebelled, and she blinded herself to them and insisted the world should be blinded also.

As youth slipped away, her vanity grew greater, till her love of admiration was scoffed at behind her back, and mocked hourly by the fresh loveliness on every side. Apart from the folly

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of vanity, the Queen was clear-headed and far-seeing, keen of wit, and sharp of tongue as ever. That marvellous gift of holding her friends and keeping their devotion did not desert her. She was surrounded by the greatest men of the age; the men of action and the men who dreamed dreams; statesmen who have been the wonder of the years; poets who have sung for all time; soldiers and sailors whose very names warm the heart yet. And among them all Elizabeth played the game of life with vast skill and diplomacy still, setting one power of Europe against another for the final good of England; France against Scotland and Spain, and the Netherlands against both; while as of old she moved the living pieces upon the world's great chess-board with her small, white, wrinkled hands, and smiled to herself. But she grew very tired, and the affairs of state weighed her frail body down. A deep and undying regret burned into her soul that there was no heir, no heir beloved of the people and herself, to take her place, but that the crown would at last rest upon the head of the son of the Queen of Scots, whom she, with all

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England, had ever counted her bitterest enemy. For fifteen years she had stood between this woman and death, and now the climax had come. Her ministers entreated her to make an ending, and gave her no rest day or night.

On the other hand, she was threatened from many quarters.

Spain made no secret of saying that the man who would take Elizabeth's life should be canonised as a saint.

The Pope poisoned every Catholic mind against her and directed a crusade to defeat her.

There were plots for her assassination thought out on sea and on land—subtle, deep-laid plots, following thick and fast on each other. Yet she knew no fear, or at least showed nothing of it to any, but went freely about as in the golden earlier days, refusing to hear or see aught of danger. Her people were her people, and she trusted them wholly or not at all. To her ministers and courtiers, her Ladies-in-Waiting and chamberers, the envoys and ambassadors, she was as a lock without a key, a puzzle past finding out, a complexity of all the intensely lovable charac-

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teristics welded with those that were repelling, subtle, and capricious; but to the people she had never changed, and treated them as a mother treats a child she loves. She listened with endless patience to their woes and griefs, and gave them her pity.

The Court, following the Queen's mood, had been restless for many months. It journeyed to Whitehall, and masks and pageants filled the days and nights. Then it moved to Richmond, and from there to Greenwich, or, as Elizabeth called it, her "House of Delight." Even yet she went Maying into the Greenwich forest with her ladies and gentlemen, and there were revels on the green in fair weather and bowling matches and tourneys, though from year to year the actors changed in all these scenes.

The pages who had been at Somerset Palace on that night of mist ten years back were all sturdy fellows, long of limb and bearded of face now, and other little lads flitted about in blue and silver, and ate comfits, and pulled merry-thoughts with the Queen's maids. The guards and servants had for the most part given place

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to younger men, and old Ulick kept the plaisance and postern gate no more, for he with many another had come to the end of life's road.

LORD YELVERTON RETURNS TO
LONDON

CHAPTER XII

IT was a morning in January, and the Court was once more at Somerset House. They had fled the palace at Greenwich by reason of the plague, for one of the Ladies-in-Waiting had been seized with the dread illness in the Queen's very presence, and had fallen to the floor horribly convulsed. When her death followed in the space of three hours, that glittering, life-loving company grew panic-stricken, and in the space of three more hours the palace was deserted. Here in Somerset House, wind-swept and sweet from having been freshly set in order, they breathed once more, and fear gradually took wing.

In the coffee-room the morning sun streamed through the great emblazoned window and painted the waxed floor with checkered colour; across the rose-garden, deserted and forlorn now, yet showing here and there through the snow on the bushes scarlet berries where the blossoms had

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been, one could see the Thames glittering in the morning light.

A lady stood by the window and looked out, while two others worked at their tambour frames and chattered.

"Her Majesty hath gathered them in from the east and west," said one—a dark, bright-faced girl—"aye, and from the south and from the north! We will not lack for courtiers at the next mask. Those who do not love the life in London must perforce *grow* to love it, or smother their dislike and teach themselves to smile at it.

"It seems there have been many goodly, admirable gentlemen tucked away on their estates here and there, in out-of-the-way places, preferring—with wretched taste—a dull life to a merry one, and these the Queen hath dragged from their hiding-places. My faith! I heard her say but yesterday to Lord Walsingham, 'Now, my Lord, 'tis to see who are our friends. The times be troublesome. We have bidden all those to Court whose long absence hath given us reason to doubt their loyalty. Yet, mind you this, though we may have what looks like reason, we do not say

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we doubt it. But we would know where we can best put our faith. We will see these truant gentlemen for ourselves and learn from their own lips their love for us. Marry! we need them; England needs them—aye, all the young and the strong—for those who are not for us are against us.' ”

The girl paused and drew a long breath, and the beautiful woman standing looking out at the river smiled a little.

“You have copied Her Majesty's words and manner to the life, Lady Lettice,” she said. “ ’Tis so indeed she speaks.”

The other girl, working at her tambour frame, broke into a merry laugh.

“ ’Tis nothing to what she can do, Lady Joyce,” she said.

Joyce Caverden threw her hands out with a little protesting gesture.

“Nay,” she said, “I will listen no further, sweetheart. The Queen's manner and words are her own. I like them not on other lips.”

The pretty Maid of Honour pouted.

“Thou art ever so particular, Joyce,” she said. “I meant no harm. But is it not gladsome to

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think there will be many new faces at Court? Some handsome ones, too, I trow. Beshrew me, but I love new faces."

Joyce sighed and smiled again.

"And I love old ones," she said gently.

"But thou art so queer and so difficult to understand," returned the other. "Thou art quiet and peaceful enough withal, but never gay. Now, I care naught for quiet and peace, but love gayety and joyance and all delight."

Joyce shook her head.

"Think you not I love such things too, sweetheart? Aye, truly I do, though, look you, they come no more my way. But enough of this. I am glad for thy sake the Court will be gay. The Queen hath scarcely smiled since news was brought her of Sir Philip Sidney's death."

"And when the Queen doth not smile, we may not smile either," said the little dark maid. "'Tis a treasonable, deadly thing to have a light heart when Her Majesty hath a heavy one, all the world knows. But she hath shaken off gloom at last, and refreshed her spirit but yester morn

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

by counting over all her gowns with the Mistress of the Robes. By the Rood! she was weary before it was done, for there are no less than three thousand of them, each one more gorgeous than the last! I would she might fancy me enough to bequeath to me the one of yellow uncut velvet trimmed with lace lilies and tiny pearls; but I have no favour with her, an' my tongue hath twice displeased her."

"'Tis in truth a naughty, wayward tongue," said Joyce smiling. "Let it not run away with thee, little one."

"'Tis the one God gave me," answered the girl, laughing. "My faith! I would have made myself differently throughout. But—of these new gentlemen, heard you not that one arrived last night? No? Well, he did. And I was with the Queen reading her the French Court news when he was ushered in. Aye, truly! and she was mightily glad to see him and straightway forgot me; so I—well, never mind—I enjoyed myself as never before! He was the goodliest man I ever saw, Lady Joyce. Stood six feet two if he stood an inch! An' he was mightily dark

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

and full of grace in all his movements, and his eyes were great and brilliant; but he was not young, for there were silver shades on his hair, and he had no gayety about him. The Queen talked to him till I thought she would never tire, and questioned him and drew him on to tell her of all his inmost life, as is her subtle way. She hath the art, you know, of turning a man's thoughts inside out. And, in good sooth, this handsome gentleman told her much that he had not intended to, before she was through with him, that I will gainsay.

“It seems he lives in the very north of Scotland and was left great estates there by some old bachelor with few of kith or kin. It was in this fashion, as far as I could follow: These lands and moneys were left to him on condition he earned certain money, and was willing to marry the niece and ward of the rich old bachelor. Now, he was *mightily in debt*, and therefore over-willing to marry the maid and share the fortune. The money also he earned by juggling on the streets of London and at bridge-end——”

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

The Lady Joyce Caverden had turned with a sudden cry and her two hands held tight against her heart.

The girl stopped speaking and stared with astonishment.

"What hurt thee?" she said anxiously. "Art ill?"

"Truly, no!" Joyce returned. "'Twas nothing. A catch o' my heart—go on with thy story."

"Prythee, 'tis well. Thou didst startle me out o' my senses! Well—well—where was I? Oh, yes!

"He juggled at bridge-end until in all he had twenty rose-nobles—the gold that was needed—and then, because he cared not whether he lived or died——"

"Said he so?" Joyce asked breathlessly, "or are those thy words?"

"Nay, I make up none of the tale," she returned primly. "'Tis as I heard it and as he spoke, word for word. Then, *because he cared not whether he lived or died*, he went to Scotland to marry old Frazer's—now I mind me of

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

the old dour bachelor's name—old Frazer's ward, but, alack-a-day! 'twas nearly a year since his death, for the law had moved slowly, and in that time what think you had happened?"

The other Maid of Honour shook her head.

Joyce Caverden said nothing. Her great blue eyes were frozen upon the face of the little garrulous maid, who vastly enjoyed the effect her story was having.

"Why, look you both—just simply *this!*" she went on. "That *little fool*, who was niece and ward to Frazer, had married—yes, *married* (or thought she had)—the bailiff of his estate ere the breath had fairly left her uncle's body! And now she was, though but sixteen years old, the mother of twins—twin boys, mark you—and the bailiff—aye, there is more to follow—the bailiff (a young man and mightily handsome) had met his death at the hands of some jealous lover of hers in a common tavern brawl! So was she left lamenting—a wife, a mother, and a widow. Now hearken! the story goes a bit further. Of this marriage to the bailiff there was

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

no proof worth the reading. Some wretched justice o' the peace had read the lines o'er them, and as she was under age, and there had been no witness, it would not hold good before any court.

"Truly, that little fool had made a tangle of her affairs; but, as these things were, she was still that dour old Frazer's ward, and to end a long story, though a vastly entertaining one, Lord Yelverton—for so it seems the goodly dark gentleman is called—decided to *still* wed the wench, as much now for her sake as his own, for, in truth, otherwise she was in most *pitiful* case.

"'Moreover,' he said, '’twas all the same to him whether he wed or no; one way or the other, he cared not a toss.' But 'twas mightily chivalrous, to my mind, and the tale was well worth hearing." She paused, then caught her breath and went on. "But that is not all yet. I had almost let the best part slip. He hath not met the woman from that day to this, though the little twins be ten years old, and of them he is vastly fond. What think you of that?"

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

The other Maid of Honour gave a sigh of relief as the tale ended.

The Lady Joyce stared with wide eyes at the thoughtless little speaker.

"How came you to hear all this, sweetheart?" she asked softly, leaning toward her.

The girl laughed and glanced up through her curled lashes, biting her scarlet lips at the same moment.

"Now thou wilt be vexed," she said. "And 'twas no harm. I slipped behind the yellow curtains, curled up on the great window-seat, and heard every word from there. Marry! the Queen forgot I was in the room."

By one chance and another, as well as in answer to special summons, there happened to be a large gathering of notable men in London. The flower of the nobility was again at Court, and after six months of depression, felt alike by the masses and the aristocracy, a reaction had set in and gayety held sway.

England was on the eve of the tragedy of Queen Mary's death. Plots and counter-plots were being constantly ferreted out by the secret

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

police, and the life of Elizabeth was threatened openly in Spain and Rome. Cross-currents of feeling swept the English people, yet, in the main, they were deeply loyal to the throne. Through all, the Queen gave them her absolute good faith, for at least she had a fearlessness and high courage. For the time being she assumed a spirit of light-heartedness—if she had it not—and was often seen in public with so small a guard as to be virtually unprotected. Being the most consummate actress of her day, she blinded all but the keenest eyes to the true state of her mind. Her unstrung nerves, fits of long weeping, the sleepless pacing of her room, were secrets few knew.

She had not yet signed the fatal document that the world condemns, though by night and day her ministers urged her to it.

The unlifted strain told little by little, for the Queen's eyes grew large and her face sharp and lined. Yet in public she did not relax her vivacity one whit, or fail to take a seemingly eager interest in the pastime of the hour.

The palace at Westminster was being remod-

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

elled in part, and Richmond was not to her taste. So Somerset House was thrown open, and the French buildings were filled with members of the foreign embassy and their wives and daughters.

Men who had been long absent from England were seen once more upon the London thoroughfares, and oftentimes were received and recognised by warm, ringing cheers.

Lord Leicester, Lieutenant-General of the troops, was freshly home from the Netherlands. Sir Walter Raleigh had returned from Virginia. Lord Howard and Drake happened to be in port, and the Pelican lay at Deptford. Young Admiral Winter had been seen at St. Paul's, Captains Hawkins and Frobisher, with the Earl of Cumberland and other rashly adventurous young nobles, were awaiting spring to again sail north.

A spirit of mad mirth and good fellowship overflowed the city, and for the time the dregs of care sank to the bottom of the world's simmering caldron of great affairs.

The Thames was bright with ships at anchor

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

bearing many flags, and the weather being mild and fair for January, small craft plied back and forth constantly.

Twilight was creeping over London, and lights here and there were beginning to twinkle out. There was to be a great mask at Somerset House that night, and the candle-bearers were busy, for the palace would be lit from wing to wing.

In the long halls there were mighty cressets branching from the walls, holding twenty tall wax tapers apiece, and many of these were already showing their fairy flame; but the shorter passages that led to the suites of rooms, or threaded here and there in what seemed, to those unacquainted with the place, a perfect maze planned but to bewilder the wits, were dim and shadowy. Two men turned down one of these narrow passages a little after sunset, and they were talking together. One was dark and of a magnificent physique, and he walked with a lithe buoyancy. He wore a doublet of russet silk overlaid with silver brocade that glistened as he moved. The ruff at his throat was of Flemish

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

lace, and his long-boots of russet-hued cordovan were pointed at the toes and of the latest fashion. About his waist he was girdled with a leather belt enclosed in flexible golden filigree, and from this dangled a small toy-like Venetian dagger, the case of which was studded thickly with turquoise. In his hand he carried a wide-brimmed soft hat circled with silver cord and tassels.

The man at his side was white-haired, and the outline of his face was sharp and worn. His spare figure was clothed in long, black, rough silk nether-hose and black doublet, while upon the sleeves were embroidered in purple the coat-of-arms of the family of Yelverton, the house he served. He moved like a shadow beside the radiant figure in russet and silver.

“By my faith, Michael, we have taken the wrong turn and lost our bearings in these cross trails!” said the dark man. “Know you whether we should pass this stair? Methinks, after all, the Queen’s apartments lie in the opposite direction, or I am vastly mistaken. Ah! yonder comes a lady; we will ask her of her grace to set us

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

right, for I have scant time to waste threading a maze."

The two men stopped and awaited the approaching figure. The woman had entered the passage quite a long way from where they stood and now came slowly toward them, her eyes on the ground, looking intently about as though she searched for something. In one hand she held a crystal candlestick, in which was a lighted candle.

She wore a gown of cream-hued uncut velvet bordered with narrow dark fur, and the long, open sleeves fell back, showing her bare white arms.

Her hair, which was of a peculiar blond shade, was coiled high on her small head and caught there with a golden dart. The lashes of her eyes were dark, and the narrow arched brows matched in shade.

The two men watched her as she came slowly nearer, and they scarce breathed. Suddenly she raised her eyes and saw them. The candle, which she shaded with one hand from the draughts in the passage, flickered, and threw rose-lights up over the beauty of her face.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Old Michael crossed himself.

"Mother of Christ!" he said softly.

Yelverton took a step forward and seemed about to speak, then stood still, and for the moment his voice failed. Presently he gained it.

"May I beg of you to direct me to the yellow-room?" he said unsteadily. "Her Majesty grants me an audience there at this hour. *But first—* but—first—mademoiselle, pardon me, you search for something, do you not? If so, let me help you find it."

She gave him the deep courtesy of the Court, and smiled—a little, inscrutable smile.

"I give thee thanks, but I have only dropped a rose," she answered. "Some foot might crush it an' it were left here; in any case it would die too soon, and I would not have it suffer overmuch. Methinks, good sir, to pluck a flower is to do it enough evil. But, prythee, let me not detain you; the yellow-room lies but a short distance yonder. I will lead the way."

Yelverton dropped on one knee and glanced here and there across the floor.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"A rose, say you?" he answered eagerly. "Now, of what sort? A gloria, or the Queen's-heart, or a damask? Go you, Michael, a bit farther down and search by the wainscotting. Look carefully, old one! It cannot be far. Look carefully!"

The old figure moved slowly off, with bent head and downcast eyes; a vague trembling was in his limbs, and his hair stirred at the roots with an unnamed terror.

Yelverton stood up, still glancing keenly about the darkening passage.

"Said you it was a red rose?" he asked, leaning toward the girl.

"In truth it was a red rose, though I said not so," she answered with an upward glance.

"One you had worn, perchance?" he questioned persistently. "Is it not so?"

"Marry! yes, though that is of small import. Trouble not further over it, sir, I pray thee. I will show thee on thy way."

The man took a step forward, and then stooped down and picked up the flower from where it lay in the deep shadow.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"So!" he said, "I have it. But pardon me; art sure, mademoiselle, this was *thy* very rose?"

The woman gave a low laugh.

"In good sooth, yes," she answered. "'Tis a red rose, and I passed this way not ten moments ago, and lost *just such a one* to the last leaf!"

"There be many roses i' the palace," he answered warily, "though it be January. Many people also may have come this way and dropped a rose. 'Tis a simple matter. Now, if this particular one—and I know not that it is, on second notice, so very red—if, therefore, this especial one be not *thine*, egad! *I* might keep it. But, being *thine*, and as thou dost so desire it, why, unwillingly I give it back." Then, as she took the flower, on a sudden his voice fell to a half whisper.

"'Tis the first rose I have held for many a day, mademoiselle," he said, "for God knows I have sojourned long where they do not grow."

Slowly he drew her eyes up to his own, and slowly she held the rose out toward him.

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He took it without a word and closed his hand upon it.

"I will lead on to the yellow-room, good sir," she said softly. "Peradventure the Queen waits."

THE JUGGLER AT THE MASK
BALL

CHAPTER XIII

THE bell of St. Paul's had just rung ten times. The night was frosty and a light, feathery snow fell steadily. It piled up on the riggings of ships at anchor on the Thames and outlined even their smallest ropes and spars. It covered the Queen's barge as she lay at the foot of the marble water-stair, and turned her into a tiny fairy-castle of shining minarets and domes. It drifted into the gables and angles of Somerset House, draped the windows and powdered the flower-cut cornices and warm red brick walls with a silvery whiteness. From every window shone yellow candle-light, and the great doors above the colonnade swung open constantly as coach after coach drove up with their company of maskers. Dancing had not yet begun, but in the throne-room a little play was being given by the Lord Chamberlain's Players, who were especially bidden to the mask by Her Majesty. The

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sound of laughter and applause echoed from the group of onlookers as the short play ended, for it had been a merry comedy, and one written by young Ben Jonson. As the actors dispersed, they were not more motley in their dress than the courtiers themselves. The fashions of the time had been discarded, and notable men of the hour for once gladly lost their identity.

Kings and queens of other days, grand dames and crusaders, fools and friars, shepherds and soothsayers, fairies and warlocks, witches and wizards, flitted through the halls or moved toward the throne, draped and canopied with cloth of gold, where Elizabeth as the Queen of Sheba held her court of wisdom, beauty, and love.

In a room in the French buildings just beyond the palace a man paced restlessly back and forth with long, swinging steps as the night wore on. Now and then he would stop and listen, his eyes burning; then, when no sound answered him, would turn to his ceaseless walking again.

"By the saints of God!" he said to himself hotly, "there could not be *two* such. The face

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was the same. Aye, the same fathomless eyes from which her soul looked up at me; the same red mouth and firm snowy chin; the same strange blond hair that curls and blows about her head like sun-kissed foam—and yet—and yet—God! the dead do not return.”

He swung about and stopped abruptly beneath a hanging light, while he unclasped his hand from the rose it still held and raised the flower to his lips.

“ ’Tis the very madness which came upon me once before,” he said half fiercely. “It drives the last vestige of reason from my brain. Nay, I am a fool, a damnable fool. Ten years of life—aye, ten dull, slow-going centuries rather—have I given to a dream, an’ I am no whit cured, for it still hath more power over me to-day than any living reality. The one thing Fate refused me is still the one thing I desire, and, by the Lord Harry! I will have it yet. This woman hath *her* face. I will content myself with such beauty. Methinks there could not be such another *soul* as that I loved, but my lady of to-day is rarely gentle—aye, tender even of a flower; thoughtful lest some foot should crush the life

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from a rose. Verily, of such a spirit was Joyce Davenport."

A faltering step came down the outer hall and stopped; there was a knock at the door, and Yelverton strode across the room and threw it widely open.

"Egad! Michael, but I have grown impatient!" he cried. "Thy news, old one? Thy news? But first take this glass o' wine and seat thyself, for thou art trembling like a leaf."

The old servant lifted the glass with a shaking hand to his lips, then put it down untasted.

"Nay, my Lord," he answered, "I want it not."

"Drink it," said Yelverton shortly, a quick frown darkening his face.

Michael obeyed and sat down in the chair he pushed forward.

"Now," said the man, standing before him still and dark. "Keep me not waiting, old one. Hast learnt aught?"

"In truth, yes, my Lord," he said as by an effort. "I went here and there through the

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

palace and I spoke to one and another, a word to this one, a question to that. Little by little I got enough o' the story to piece together."

"Yes, yes!" interrupted Yelverton. "Tell it me, then."

"Ten years ago, my Lord," the trembling voice went on, "come last September, there was a night o' heavy mist an' fog on London. That night one Lord Richard Caverden, whom none remember to have seen or heard of before, came to Somerset House with his daughter. It may have been they arrived at different hours, no one knows. Lord Caverden was stabbed by a drunken guard, so they say, and died i' the great hall, none being with him but the Queen and two of her ministers. His body, which was that of a vastly handsome man six foot four, was embalmed and laid in the death-chamber. He lay in a suit of buff, with rough silk nether-hose. Thereafter was he transferred to Caverden. The Lady Joyce Caverden stayed i' the palace as one of the Queen's maids. No attendants came with either of them, but the Lady Joyce had always with her a small rough-haired dog, a

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dog of the common people, for two toes of each of his forefeet were broken, as the law commands."

The man listening made no sign, but his face was very white.

"It was on a night of mist and fog ten years ago come last September, my Lord," ended old Michael, "Davenport o' the Bridge disappeared. He wore a suit o' buff that evening, but one night earlier Mistress Joyce was said to have drowned herself i' the Thames. My Lord! my Lord!" the shaking voice broke into a cry, "'tis still a mystery, but there were not two other i' London like *those* two. That fair woman whose rose you have is Joyce Davenport o' the Bridge."

Yelverton leaned down and laid his hand on the bent shoulder. There was a light in his eyes and a wave of red had flooded his face to the very edge of the close dark hair.

"Enough, good Michael!" he said hoarsely. "Speak no more. I thank thee for thy tidings. How goes the time, old one?"

"St. Paul hath rung eleven," he answered.

"And the dance goes on at the palace? I

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

still wear the russet and silver—that will not do—that will not do, for 'tis a mask, and Her Majesty insists upon motley.

“Bring me the leathern suit. Aye, I know you have it folded somewhere. Bring me the leathern suit and the peaked hat with the pheasant's feather; yes, and the cordovan long-boots with battlemented tops and— By the Mass! an' if you would please me, tell me not that you have forgotten the mask!”

The punch-bowls, standing on little tables here and there through the rooms and passageways, had been refilled many times since the dance began, and the Lord of Revelry reigned for these few hours before the dawn. No masks were yet removed, and the scarlet lips or bearded ones below them curved in smiles and bandied mocking jest or flattery.

Strange partners found each other and met and parted in the light-heeled throng. Here the Witch of Endor glided past, swiftly followed by an Egyptian Pharaoh; King Solomon stepped a coranto with Ruth; Alfred who burnt the cakes made love in a shadowy doorway to a little shepherdess of the heathery hills.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

The Queen herself was growing tired; there were violet shadows beneath her eyes, and her hands trembled as they rested on the arm of her gilded chair.

"Methinks," she said, turning to a gentleman near by, "that we have not recognised Lord Yelverton."

"He hath not been here, Your Majesty," he answered, "or we would have done so. But look, I pray you; who comes yonder?"

A man threaded his way through the dancers with swift steps. He stood head and shoulders above those who passed, and as for his dress it was of sober brown leather, following the lines of his firmly knit figure as though moulded upon it. His boots, of soft tan, rose to the mid-thigh, and were flaring and battlemented. He was belted with a girdle of dull gold, from which dangled a toy-like Venetian dagger set with turquoise. The linen at the man's throat was smooth and fair, and upon his short dark hair rested a peaked leather cap holding one long pheasant's feather. He was masked as the rest, and came forward to the foot of the Queen's throne and there knelt to kiss her hand.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Who art thou?" she said, smiling, "or what name art thou known by, friend?"

"I am but a juggler, Your Majesty," he answered softly, "one who earns his bread by the tossing of knives and balls."

"We will test thy skill on the morrow," she returned, nodding. "Go thy way and be merry. Thou art most welcome, good sir."

He moved lightly down and mingled with the dancers. Here and there his eyes roved, searching constantly, ceaselessly, but he spoke to none. Leaving the throne-room, he stepped out into the great hall, and as he did so a woman passed him.

She wore a gown of ivory-hued silk banded here and there with golden embroidery. The square-cut bodice showed the dazzling fairness of her skin, and her silvery hair was coiled high upon her head, where a golden dart held it. Her slippers were red-heeled and of a bright yellow.

The juggler followed at distance as she went slowly on and entered a little ante-chamber hung in rose-hued silk. The place was quite deserted,

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and she threw herself into a chair before a fireplace, as though weary.

The man watched her as she leaned forward with her hands clasped. She looked into the fire and sat very still.

Then he entered the room and drew the curtains at the door behind him.

The woman rose to her feet with a broken cry.

Yelverton stepped over to her and looked down into her hidden face.

"Take off thy mask, sweetheart," he said, "for as God lives, I KNOW THEE!"

She raised her hands slowly and unclasped the black mask, which fluttered to the floor. Then she looked up steadily.

"Who say you I am, good gentlemen?" she asked, "and why have you sought me here?"

Yelverton caught her by the wrist, and, tossing off his mask also, bent his face close to hers. The light that was in his eyes when he heard old Michael's story still burned there, and upon his

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

cheek a small scar, that the girl knew, showed in dull red line.

"Thou art Joyce Davenport, my beloved," he answered unsteadily. "Life has been a masquerade for thee these ten years, God knows why. But I do not doubt thee. Whatever lies behind of evil or mystery, thou hast had no share in it. Thy soul is as white as when I gave thee farewell by the latticed window o' the toll-house. And of this one thing be sure: *Fate shall not trick me of thee twice!*"

The girl drew a quick breath.

"I am known in the palace as the Lady Joyce Caverden, good sir," she answered gently. "'Tis a name well remembered. My father's father was the King's friend, and my father, who died here by violence—as doubtless thou hast heard—lies in the vault at Caverden. Prythee, dost still question who I am?"

"Nay," he answered with a sudden flashing smile, "I question it not *one whit*. I know! And thou wilt not answer me, my Lady, I will to the Queen for the truth.

"But, hark thee!" his tone changing, "'tis cruel, yet will I say it. Thy grandfather, if he

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was the gay Lord of Caverden, *died unwed*, as all the world knows. The castle on the border hath been empty these five and twenty years. I have oft passed that way and know it well. The forest where rode the King's hunting-parties is grown so dense none enter it more, and the place is given over to bats and owls and the spirits o' the past."

The girl steadied herself by one hand against the mantel.

"Though what you say be true," she returned, "'tis equally true that my father died Lord Richard Caverden, and was borne to his home. For me, I am indeed the Lady Joyce Caverden."

"By the Queen's grace," he said, "by the Queen's grace only."

She gave him a deep, sweeping courtesy, and rose and stood before him in sweet-graced silence.

Yelverton looked at her in silence also for a moment.

"Think you I will *wring* the truth from thee?" he said in a low, quick tone. "Nay, by the Mass! 'tis not my way. Yet I will know by sunrise. 'Tis a coil, a damnable coil, and some evil is at

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the bottom of it. Yet I stake my faith 'twas none of *thy* contriving. Thou art in the right, though the whole world be wrong. Fate hath been cruel. The years have slain my youth; yet *to-night* I have forgiveness for even these enemies, since I have found my own again."

The girl turned to him with a little cry, then stopped.

"Good my Lord," she answered, giving him his title for the first time, "what would you? In sooth, an' if I were that maid you speak of, and peradventure have loved—though men be not often faithful so long to a memory—still what would you? Thou art *wed*."

Yelverton threw back his head with a short, hard laugh.

"Egad! that at least is devilish truth!" he said, growing sober, "though I know not how you came to the knowledge of it. Think you—*think you*—that that would block my way to thee? *That marriage?* Not while the Pope hath power in Rome; not while there are other green countries than England, and not while there is gold to pay for the breaking of unholy fetters. Of thy grace, think me not worse than I am. See

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you, I have lived straightly enough these ten years—but for *thy* sake *only*.

“As for the woman I married,” he went on, with a little shrug, “the woman who deemed herself the bailiff’s widow, and that I could not escape an’ I would have old Frazer’s gold—on my faith, I have not seen her a dozen times. We are less than strangers, and with *intent* we go separate ways. Report says she hath been vastly satisfied; that she hath even played at love now and again with one gentleman or another. ’Tis one to me. She is most sleek and comely. She eats, drinks, and sleeps, works at her stitchery and gossips with her cousins, the two ladies who ever bear her company. She doth not read—as they tell me she hath not the art—nor doth she care for the outdoor world. Yet she loves the little lads who were born ere I saw her, and she reflects at times, ’tis said, in melancholy fashion upon the bailiff—saying her rosary with diligence for the repose of his soul. So. I have told you enough,” he ended. “And on the Rood! sweetheart, this woman shall not stand i’ my way. But come; in exchange, tell me the truth, nor let me fret my soul longer.”

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The impetuous, passionate words ceased and the girl glanced upward into his dark face. Her eyes slowly filled with tears.

"Thou hast discovered the truth," she said. "I be Joyce Davenport."

Yelverton spoke a broken word below his breath, then caught her in his arms and lifted her against his heart.

"Aye, sweet!" he said, "God made not two such as thee to cross a man's path. Now tell me, tell me straightway, how came this all so strangely about? Why was it told me on the bridge thou hadst been lost i' the Thames? Methinks something is owed me for that night's grief."

"Let me go," she panted, "if you would have me tell thee aught.

"Marry! then, listen. It was *Michael*, than ancient servant of thine, who came to me at night, that very *last* night after thou wert gone, and told me of the lands and gold in the north that might be thine if thou wouldst only have them. He said it would be ruin for me to wed thee, though I had not before thought of it so. Then he spoke of my father—of how he had lived only by Her Majesty's grace. This also I had for-

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gotten, but it seemed quite plain to me, my Lord, as he spoke, that I must not wed thee. By reason of these things, I resolved to see thee no more.

“Following this, my father learned thou hadst been at the toll-house. Aye, he was vastly angry and swore I should marry Gillian o’ the bear-gardens. The night was far spent when I went out on the Thames in the little punt. It seemed the best way, and I was not afraid. But the old bell-ringer followed with Giles Bowman, the ferryman, and they took me from the river. Marry! the bell-ringer thanked God more for the saving of my soul than my body. It had not seemed to me so wicked an act, but mayhap he was right, for he was a Puritan and lived a holy life in his own way, harming none and praying much.”

“Aye,” the man answered absently. “And then, sweetheart? And then?”

“Afterward came my father on the morrow and bade me be ready to wed Gillian o’ the Gardens when they should return with a priest at six of St. Paul’s. Nay, I would not think o’ that time. There was no one I could turn to

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

and I was fore-wearied and bewildered. Then quite suddenly I bethought me of a ring the Queen had given me by chance, when once she rode over the bridge long before. She bade me show it at the palace-gate an' I would ever enter. So I took the ring and fled, only Silas knowing. Marry! I wore this very little gown as my father had bidden me against my wedding."

"And the Queen?" he said, watching her face.

A smile curved the girl's lips.

"I would I could tell thee of Her Majesty's goodness to me," she said. "I love her greatly and would serve her, or *die* for her an' that would serve her better. But there is more to follow. That was a night of heavy mist. The palace was lit as it is now, and they danced in the throne-room. Then came my father to the water-stairs, for he had traced me here. He angered the guard, but escaped them and reached the colonnade and entrance-hall. There he was overtaken and given his death-blow. Lord Burghley brought word of this to the Queen, and she went with him to where my father lay dying. The Count de Simier was there likewise;

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

he who was envoy, you remember, for the Queen's betrothed, François de Valois, Duke of Alençon; the Court physician looked on also. I know not in what way the knowledge came to the Queen, but she discovered then that my father, Richard Davenport, was the son of Lord Caverden, the King's friend. She gave him knighthood as he lay dying, and restored to him the lands of Caverden; for my sake, as she told me."

The girl's voice trembled and stopped.

Yelverton raised one of her little hands to his lips. Then he stood quite still.

"'Twas Michael—*Michael*—said you, who told thee that story of Frazer's will?" he questioned slowly.

"Verily, yes," Joyce returned.

"Michael!" the man repeated again as to himself. "*Old Michael*. So he has known the reason all these years. Fool! that I thought not of him."

Then he caught her hands in his.

"Let it go," he cried softly. "Aye, let it go. We will think no more of what is past. I have thee, sweetheart, I have thee. The world may swing which way it will."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

She drew back from him and the colour flew up into her face.

"Think not so, my Lord," she said. "Thou art still wed."

"Did I not tell thee that shall be undone?" he said, bending his face to hers. "Joyce! Joyce!"

The girl shook her head, and about her tender mouth came the determined look that long ago Dick Davenport of the Bridge had grown to know.

"After taking that gold—of thy free will—on the conditions it was given thee," she said, "wouldst use it to break the bonds it holds thee by? Nay," her tone changing, "I know thee not if such would be thy plan."

He laughed softly, exultingly, but still held her hands so she could not withdraw them.

"Thou hast not heard all," he said. "By my faith, I have been the very sport of Fortune all my life. Chance hath diced for my happiness. Look you, sweet! I need nothing that ever belonged to old Frazer of Dundee, for scarce had I gone north and married his ward ere word was brought me that a kinsman of mine in France,

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

unknown to me save by name, had died and bequeathed me enough of wealth to set me even with the world, and leave no possibility of poverty following in my wake. This he did for love of my mother. Marry! 'twas the irony of luck an' I could find it in my heart to wish this kinsman had had the grace to die earlier, for then I had not missed these ten years o' life's joy. Yet that, too, I will forgive, seeing I have thee again."

The girl stood before him, still and silent. In the depths of her eyes fear grew slowly.

"Answer me, sweetheart!" Yelverton cried. "Say thou wilt wed me when I break these bonds?"

"Nay, my Lord, that I cannot say," she answered.

He bent toward her with a quick darkening of his eyes.

"Dost not love me still?" he questioned. "Methinks I know the signs."

"Truly, I love thee," she answered.

"Then thou wilt go my way?" he returned.

Joyce caught her hands away from his.

"Nay, tempt me no more, my Lord," she cried

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

softly, "tempt me no more. I am but a woman and I love thee. Yet I would do right."

He smiled.

"Now I am content to leave it so, sweet!" he said. "Now will I not ask thee to come to me unless it be of thy own will."

OLD MICHAEL GOES ON A
JOURNEY

CHAPTER XIV

SIX weeks had gone by since the night of the masquerade. Six tedious, slow-going weeks for the Court, for it followed the Queen's caprices, and coloured its temper as much as might be to match hers. When she was gay, gayety reigned; when she was melancholy, there were long and sober faces on every side; and she danced, her lords and ladies danced likewise, but if she chose to walk instead, they followed. If she would be amused, they ransacked their wits to amuse her, but if she gave over the day to meditation, they were thoughtful likewise. Yet none lost their temper because the Queen lost hers, or returned her cutting satires in like coin. During these days her soul was as a harp out of tune, and every stray hand jangled the strings. A thousand torturing regrets stung her when she thought, and memory stalked through the corridors of the past, giving her no peace. Therefore, she banished memory as much as might be, and

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

would not think if it were possible to keep thought in leash. Being ever variable and given to impulse, she had again veered about, and after a period of much revelry, kept to the seclusion of her own apartments and out of sight of the Court. Merriment was at a stand-still, and the little Maids of Honour pined and reviled their fate.

When these unhappy moods overtook Her Majesty, she kept the one that chanced to please her best, or had power most surely to charm her thoughts from herself, close by her side, and for the time being that person was to all intents a prisoner. Whoever it might be, she would not let them away from her presence, yet lavished upon them every favour the while she demanded superhuman patience and indulgence of them for her numberless moods and fancies.

It was the Lady Joyce Caverden upon whom the lot fell this time, and the Queen kept her continually near her. No one else, she maintained, could read so clearly in the Latin, or made the French Court news such pleasant hearing.

During the long sleepless nights when the

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

Queen walked back and forth restlessly till the little hours, only the Lady Joyce could coax slumber to her eyes by playing on the lute or singing in her tender, low-pitched voice.

The girl's eyes grew over-bright during these days, and there were great shadows beneath them. Yet she never failed in patience or charity toward the woman she served. What was not to be understood she would not question, but gave, as was her nature, a simple loyalty and good faith where she gave her love.

She had not seen Lord Yelverton since the night of the mask, nor heard from him directly, but she knew he still had rooms in the French buildings, for the Maids of Honour chattered volubly of all the doings of those gentlemen of the Court who were goodly enough of presence to catch the eye.

One evening at early candle-light, Joyce Caverden chanced to go into the yellow-room to look for a letter the Queen had mislaid. As she entered she saw Lord Yelverton standing alone by the window that overlooked the river. He turned to her, his face lighting up suddenly, and caught her to him.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"So!" he cried softly, "it is thee at last? My patience hath all but gone; one way and another things have bid fair to drive me mad. Doth Her Majesty always keep thee so close?"

"In truth, no," she answered, "but her spirit is sorely vexed in some fashion during these days, and I must minister to her while she needs me, or till she grows better."

"Aye, sweet," he answered, "I fear me you minister to what Will Shakespeare calls 'a mind diseased,' but I need thee as well. My mind has been on the rack through these past weeks."

Joyce looked up into his dark face and saw how lined and worn it was and deep about the eyes for want of sleep.

"What hast come to thee?" she cried. "Thou art ill!"

"No, I be not ill, but most unhappy. That old servant, whom thou hast reason to remember—Michael—hath disappeared. Since the night of the mask no one hath seen him. I have moved heaven and earth to find him, and now believe he hath taken his own life. 'Tis a desperate grief to me."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"But for what reason?" she questioned, her eyes wide and frightened.

"There is but one reason I can think of," returned Yelverton. "I told him once, beloved, if I ever found the one who turned thee away from me, *I would kill him*. 'Twas Michael, as thou dost know."

Joyce raised up and put one hand upon his lips.

"Say it not!" she said. "He did that, as he hath done everything all his life, for love of thee."

"Aye," answered the man. "But he hath long known his zeal outstripped his knowledge that time, and he hath suffered. Memory gives me a thousand signs by which I know he hath suffered."

"I must to the Queen, my Lord," she said.

"I shall see thee later—or on the morrow?" asked the man.

"I have it in my heart to hope so," answered Joyce wistfully, "though perchance I should not."

"Thou art so beautiful!" he exclaimed. "Me-

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

seemeth that is the very gown of velvet and fur thou didst wear when I met thee in the passage-way?"

"Aye," she answered, smiling, "the very gown."

"I would have thee wear it for thy wedding-dress. That little rose of thine—see you? It shall be clasped in my hand when I am dead."

"Speak not of death," she said with a shudder. "I would not think of it to-night, my Lord."

"Nay," he said, "we will only think of life. There—I will not keep thee from Her Majesty, though she owes me much in letting thee go."

An hour later Lord Yelverton turned into his apartments of the French building. The room he entered was dimly lit and by the hearth stood the bent figure of a man.

Yelverton recognised him with a start, and strode across.

"Michael!" he cried. "Michael, old one! Where hast thou been? By Heaven! you had no right to give me such a search for thee."

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

What means it all? And thou art ill! Worn away to a shadow!"

The old servant nodded his head.

"Aye," he said. "I be fore-wearied, my Lord. I have been to the north; back home to the castle."

"To the north? Home again? What mad chase was this?"

The white face was raised pitifully to his.

"Joyce Davenport o' the Bridge hath come to life and thou dost still love her," he whispered.

"'Twas *I* who set things wrong, and turned her from thee, so I would *set them right*."

His voice broke, then went on.

"I went north with *murder in my soul*, my Lord. I would have taken the life of that woman who is in name your wife, and so cleared thy path to happiness. Mayhap the sin would have lost me my soul, but that troubled me not."

Yelverton held him back with one arm and looked into his face.

"You killed her, Michael?" he said hoarsely.

The old man smiled back at him mockingly as it seemed in the gray light.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Nay," he said. "I would have, my Lord, most surely, but death forestalled me.

"The little lads brought a fever home when they came from school at Noel-tide; one of them hath died of it, and *she also*."

Yelverton drew in his breath sharply.

"Say you so?" he answered. "Say you so, old one?"

"Aye," he answered, "an' thou art once more free! But—*an' Fate had not freed thee, I would*. Marry! I—old Michael, who loved thee, yet wrought thee evil. What mattered it? She was no mate for thee; a thing without a soul; a light-o'-love——"

The feeble voice faltered.

"Nay, say it not, Michael," broke in the other. "Come, what ails thee, old one? Thou art ill—out-wearied and distraught."

The thin figure slipped against him, and Yelverton gently lowered it in his arms to a little couch near by.

"There, that is better; now thou wilt rest."

The faded eyes looked up adoringly into his face.

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

"Aye," he muttered, "things be set right. 'Tis time to rest. 'Tis time."

He drew a long fluttering breath.

Yelverton bent over him.

"Old one!" he cried. "Old one!"

There was a long pause, and out-of-doors the darkness grew deeper. In the still room the man rose from his knees and stood beside the travel-worn figure.

"So," he said. "So comes death to all of us."

It was the next morning, and Lord Yelverton and Joyce Caverden stood by the window in the yellow-room that overlooked the Thames. The river sparkled like beaten silver in the sun and ran swiftly on its way to the sea.

"Bitter years come to all, sweetheart," said the man, "but at the end joy comes not to all—as it hath to me. 'Tis not every man who hath the courage to rob Her Majesty. But I shall certainly take thee from her and carry thee to France, the land of sunshine and blue skies. When wilt thou wed me, sweetheart?"

The girl raised her face to his and touched

BY THE QUEEN'S GRACE

with her lips the little scar that showed upon his cheek.

“On the day that pleaseth thee best, my Lord,” she answered.

THE END

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